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THE DERT RAM
Emigrant Hand Book



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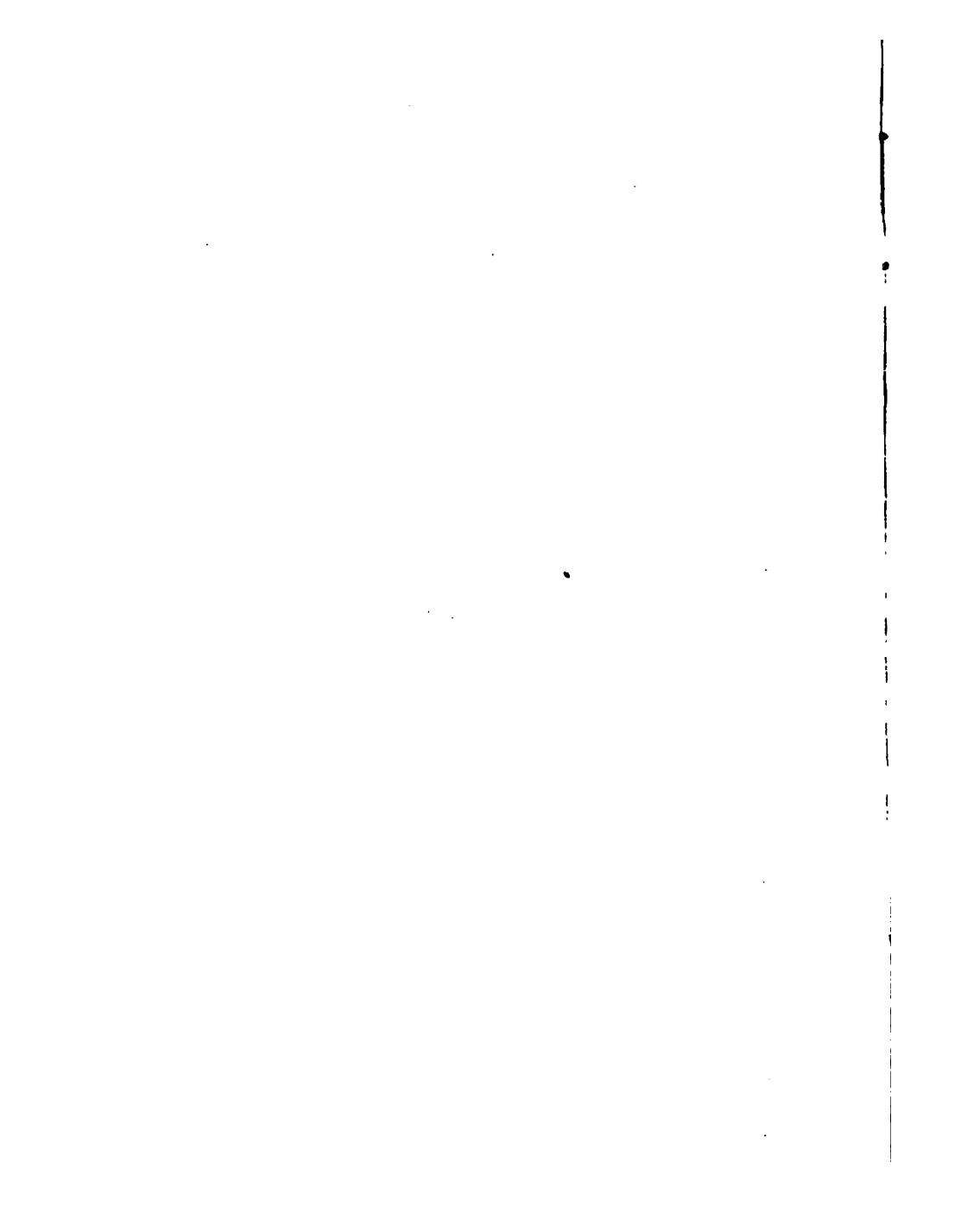


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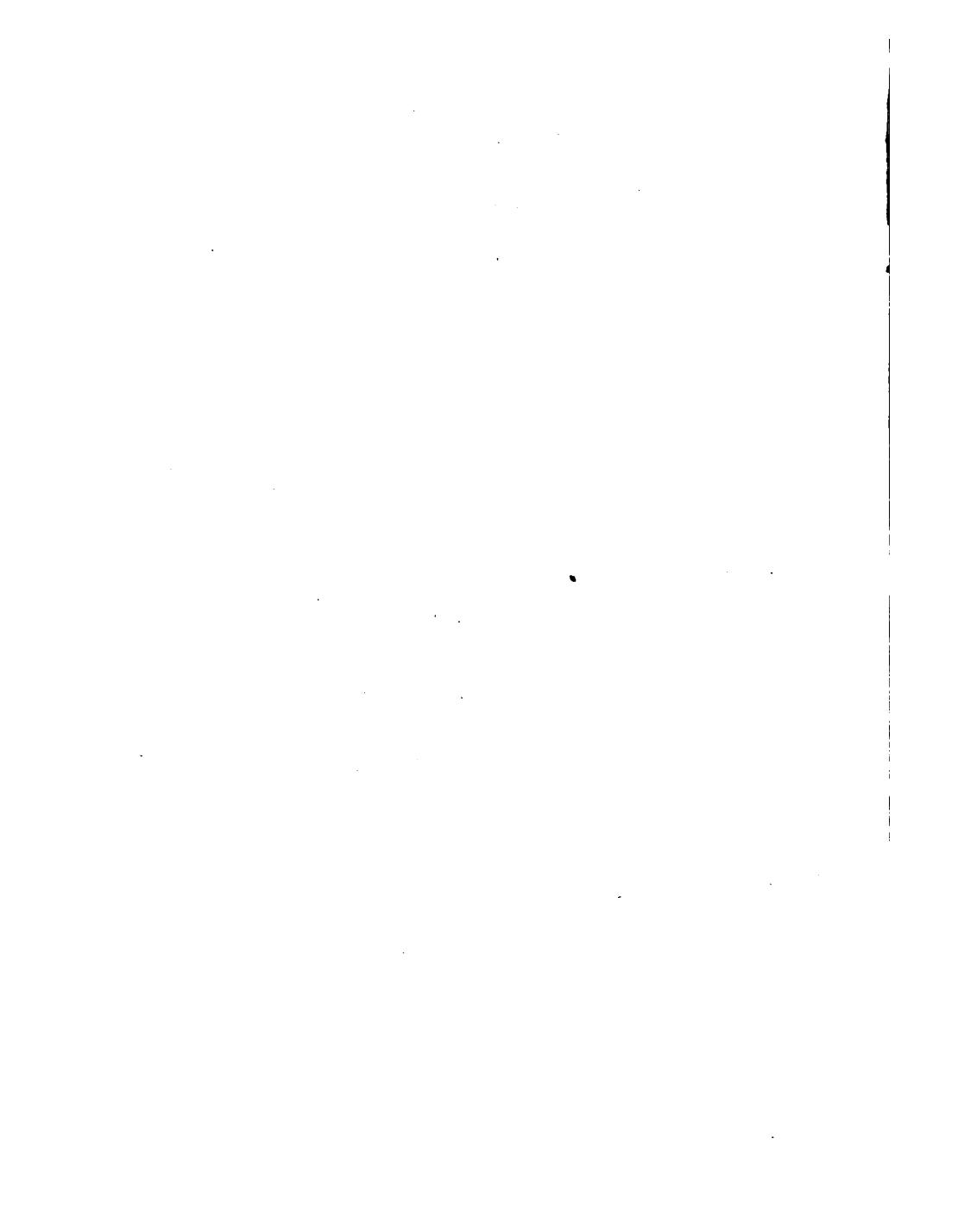




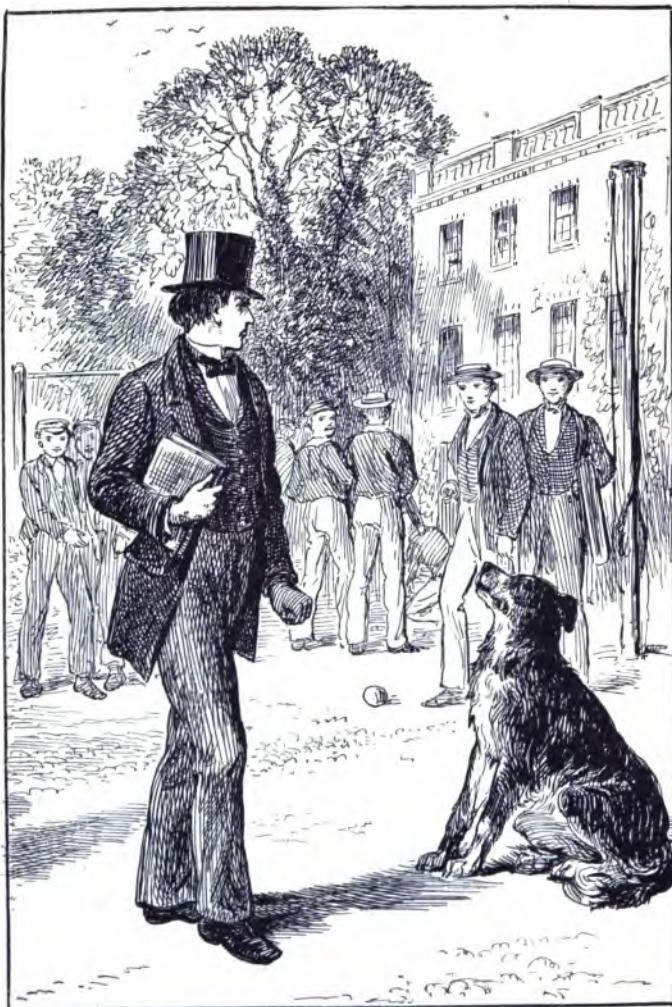
EDWARD BERTRAM











THE HEAD MONITOR BROUGHT TO BAY.

Frontispiece.

EDWARD BERTRAM

OR

THE EMIGRANT HEIR

BY

GRACE STEBBING

AUTHOR OF "PEYTON PHELPS: OR, ADVENTURES AMONG THE ITALIAN CARBONARI,"
"BRAVE GEORDIE," &c., &c.

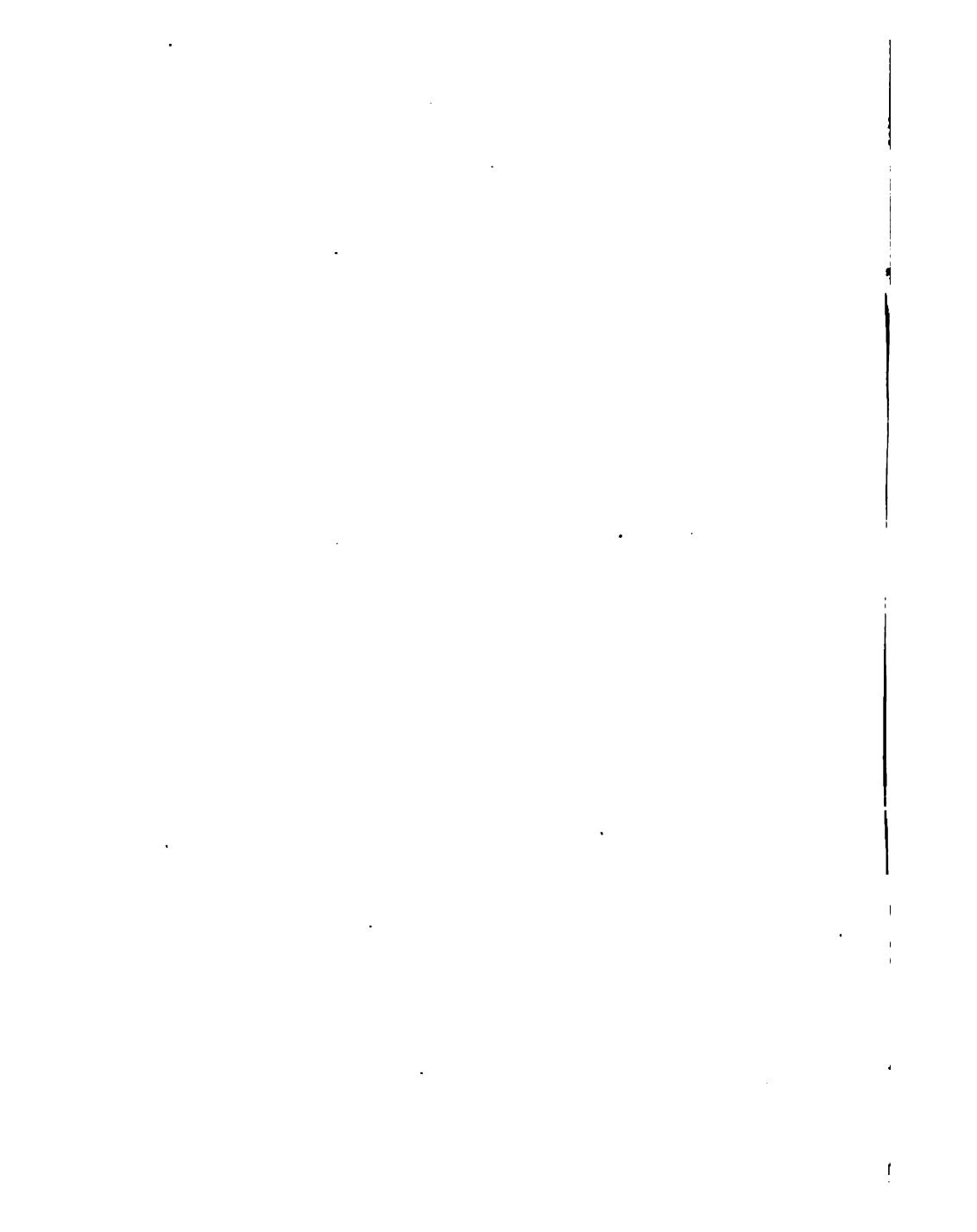


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EDWARD BERTRAM.

C H A P T E R I.

IN THE SHIP'S HOLD.

ASAILING ship for Australia in 1837 was not an abode of delight, and the hold of the *Good Bess* was a perfectly horrible place, as young Edward Bertram soon found, even before the appalling dread came upon him that he had procured for himself a most awful living grave. Ned—or, as his schoolfellows always called him, “good-tempered Ned”—had often both heard and read of men and boys getting free passages to all parts of the world, and to all sorts of glorious adventures, by contriving cleverly to conceal themselves in the holds of ships during their lading, and so he had decided that it must be a very sensible and easy thing to do.

The getting on board and hiding, in the midst of the coming and going and wild bustle kept up by a set of weeping emigrants and half-drunken sailors, had not been a difficult matter, certainly ; and after his excitement, and the fatigue of the past three days, young Bertram had no sooner crept into a corner behind a great pile of agricultural implements, than he

had fallen into a heavy sleep, too sound to be disturbed even by the heaving of the anchor, the shrill shriek of a poor woman who was bidding a final farewell to her aged parents, or the noisy good-bye songs of the ship's company. Unhappily for him, he was not even awakened by the successive thuds of flour-sacks, boxes, bales, and casks of every description that were lowered down, and even occasionally flung down into his prison-house.

The *Good Bess* had been at sea many hours when Ned awoke. He opened his eyes in perfect black darkness. For some moments he was in a state of utter bewilderment, and could not decide whether he was asleep or awake. The school dormitory had never been so entirely devoid of light before, and that he was lying in one of the hard, narrow school-beds was his first thought. But the wind was rising, and the ship was lurching a good deal, and Ned suddenly remembered where he was, and how he came there. He sat up and put out his hands; not many inches though, for there, close around him, were the stacks of rakes and spades and axes and pitchforks.

"Umph," muttered Ned, "that's the worst of books, they only give a fellow the best side of everything. I don't believe there's ever a tale I've read has said anything about its being so pitchy dark in a hold that it'll be a thousand times more difficult than the Hampton Court maze to find your way out of it. And as for stiflingness! ugh! I can hardly breathe. I'll just get up on deck at once. There are so many people on board that it is not likely I shall be noticed."

Having come to this decision Bertram rose to his feet, and carefully feeling his way with his hands, he made a couple of steps forward. In which direction was his next step to be? He had got past the barrier of tools, but another barrier now met his hands, firm, and immovable, and impassable. He stepped back into his recess, and tried for egress on the other

side. Again his trembling, eager hands met a barrier, firm, immovable, and impassable. On all sides he was hemmed in. His arms fell down, and a low cry burst from his lips, as of some poor hunted animal who sees the dogs close behind it, when its heart is beating to agony, and its breath is almost spent. Then he leapt forward wildly, and tried in headlong fashion to climb up the obstructions. Three times he got up a little way, and three times he fell back ; the last time he fell with his leg on one of the rakes, and it got a painful wound. The climbing would have been almost an impossibility even in full daylight ; in perfect darkness it was quite so.

He flung himself down again on the floor of his narrow hiding-hole with a groan, and the dash of the waves against the vessel seemed to mock his misery. There are some fearful dungeons in Venice below the level of the Adriatic, and the poor creatures in them, doomed to irrevocable death in the former times of the Doges, must have felt the same sort of hopelessness that came to young Edward Bertram, when they heard the long, quiet wash of the waters against their prison walls.

As Ned lay half-stunned with his sudden, unlooked-for calamity, he had plenty of time, poor fellow, to repent of his wrong-doing in running away from school. But if ever a boy might be forgiven for that fault, it was Edward Bertram. He had been an orphan ever since he could remember. His only relation and guardian was a very rich old bachelor great-uncle, as crabbed as rich, who thought that the two words "boy" and "nuisance" meant the same thing, and who paid extra to have his nephew and heir kept at school all the year round, not for any advantage to the boy, but to save himself being troubled with him. Ned had never known any love but the love he won from his school-fellows by his kind-heartedness ; and this very kind-heartedness it was that led to his being in his present terrible predicament—a big, fierce-tempered monitor

having thrashed him savagely for giving a rather undue amount of help to a sickly little schoolmate in his exercises.

Ned, according to his own way of expressing the matter, had put up with a great deal already, but this was the last straw that either his pride or his patience could bear. That same night he waited until all in the school-house were asleep; then he dressed himself, crept out into the corridor, got out of the window, made a desperate but successful leap into the branches of a pear-tree that grew a few feet in front of it, climbed down, and hastened away from the hated neighbourhood as fast as his feet would carry him.

"Uncle has often said he wished I was at the other side of the world," thought Edward Bertram with a smile; "now he shall have his wish."

And he made the best of his way to Portsmouth, arriving there the third day, footsore and thoroughly tired, but greatly delighted at not having been caught by the school authorities, and full of the very grandest hopes for the future.

"And this is how it is all to end!" moaned the boy, as he strained his aching eyes into the darkness, in the despairing longing to discover even the faintest ray that should aid his efforts at escape. He was growing faint with hunger, too, for it was nearly twenty-four hours since he spent his last penny on a roll. He stretched out his hands once more, and felt the walls of his narrow dungeon. The barricade on his right was evidently composed of sacks. Sacks of grain or flour, most likely. Indeed, he fancied that he could detect the pleasant odour of flour when he sniffed hard. Flour meant food, and food meant more time to live—more time to hope. Ned's courage revived a little, as, it is said, the courage of a nearly exhausted swimmer comes back to him when he sees a straw floating on the waves between him and the shore.

Our prisoner put his hand in his pocket for his knife, to cut a hole in one of the sacks. Alas! all things seemed against

him. He felt in all his pockets. But there was no knife forthcoming.

“No,” muttered the unhappy boy bitterly, “of course not. I remember now; that comes of kindness. I lent it to Dudley, the day before I ran away, to cut his pencil, and he never gave it back.”

Then he set to work with teeth and nails to try to bite or tear a hole. He might almost as well have tried to bite a bit off one of the iron spades that lay chained and padlocked together in great bundles at his feet. The sacks were new and strong, and resisted all his frantic efforts to get at their contents. At length, utterly exhausted in mind and body, he sank down, and sleep once more came mercifully to his relief from all his woes for another space of some hours.





CHAPTER II.

LAWFUL TO HANG HIM.

THE painful, gnawing sensation of starvation awoke Bertram at last, and a second time he exerted his failing strength in trying to snap, or push his fingers through, the threads of the sacks ; but darkness and hopelessness are not good helpers in any undertaking, and Ned failed, as he had done before. He searched in his pockets again, not this time to find a knife, but to gather up, if possible, even a few crumbs of bread or biscuit to stay his agony of hunger. He found nothing but a bit of string, his last copy of Latin verses, pocketed because it had a caricature of one of the masters on the back, and a bit of wood about four inches in length. Edward knew what that was by the feel of it—the smooth, shining, cruel bit of cane. That was the bit of cane that Robinson, the monitor, had broken across his schoolfellow's bruised and bleeding shoulders ; and, when his flogging was over, Edward Bertram had fetched it from the corner it had flown off to and put it in his pocket, muttering passionately that the day should yet come when he would give back that bit of cane to Robinson, and it should prove as bitter to the monitor as it had done to him. That day did come, and Bertram kept his word.

Meantime, Edward Bertram was dying of starvation, and under those circumstances he had little strength to feel deep

wrath, and even string, copy-book paper embellished with drawings and Latin verses, and the bit of wood itself, were regarded as eatable treasures, infinitely too valuable to be given away to an enemy or kept for him. The sheet of blue paper, with its thick lines of writing and blots, was eaten first, and it was bitten and chewed and sucked as though the abominable taste of the ink were as good a relish as Batty's Nabob Pickle or apple sauce to a roast goose. That feast ended, the stifling air, or rather it should be said the almost utter want of air, sent Bertram into a drowsy state again. His next meal consisted in sucking the string and gnawing the wood. He was growing very weak now. And still no human sound reached him, no air, no hope, and the waves went on beating against the sides of the ship, as though to remind him of their freedom, and to mock at his captivity. Once a mouse ran over him, and he tried to catch it, but failing in that attempt, he gathered together all his remaining strength, and made an effort to discover whether its sharp teeth had made a hole that would be of any use to him. He might have spared himself the blind search. There were plenty of sacks in the hold to afford food for any number of mice there might be there, without the sensible little wild beasts attacking those that were close to one of their human enemies. Poor young Ned's next suffering came from intolerable, feverish thirst, that made him crave for a long draught of even the salt water of the ocean.

Now and then scalding tears burnt his eyes at being doomed to die such a lonely and such a terrible death so young. Only fourteen years of life, and none of those very sunny ones. But yet—O ! he could not die—he prayed to live. He would go back to school at once, he would let Robinson flog him every day—half-a-dozen times a-day—if only he might be delivered from his dungeon, and from the agonising death so rapidly overtaking his youth and health and strength.

In some such hopeless, half-fainting way Edward Bertram

was praying when a sound fell upon his ears. Not a sound like that ceaseless wash of the waves which had grown so hateful to him. It was a sound in the hold, or close to it, and, unless there were a whole legion of mice or rats in the place, the sound was too firm and loud and distinct to be produced by any of their mischievous doings. Then a draught of fresh air came down with a rush, and swept over Bertram's fevered cheeks, and, with a wildly beating heart, a choking cry burst from his parched lips—

“Help me!—save me!”

“Hallo, Bill! do you believe in ghostesses?” muttered a big, broad-shouldered sailor, grasping his companion's arm, and hesitating on the steps leading down into the hold.

Bill shook himself free, and sprang on to the floor, exclaiming contemptuously, “Hey, Jack, for all your inches ye're nobbut a poor fool, I'm thinking, an' the largest cooward oot. Come awa', man, and let's find out what sort o' a poor, misguided wretch took upon him to have the bad thought to steal himself a free berth in this dreary, starvashun hole. If he's not dead yet, he'll not be far off, I'm thinking.”

So saying, the two men, picking their way by the aid of their lanterns amongst the piles of goods, advanced towards the spot whence the cry had come, burly Jack keeping himself, however, ready for flight, should anything in the shape of a white sheet and a broomstick make its appearance.

But they found no white sheet, only a white face, quite still, with shut eyes, and dry, white lips.

“An' it's nobbut a young lad, neither,” muttered Bill, huskily, as he knelt down, and gently passed his hand over the curly brown hair, while Jack stood by, looking almost as scared as if he were really gazing at one of those “ghostesses” that he was always expecting to come upon some day.

“Be he dead, Bill?” he whispered, and heartily wishing the while that anybody had been sent down for the wrongly stowed

flour but himself. Bill did not answer immediately, so he whispered again, with a shiver—

“ Bill, I say, Bill, tell un, be he dead?”

“ Nay, man, nay,” said the other impatiently; “ t’ lad beant dead, only nigh enough that gate to stand no dawdin’, so just ye step aside and haud t’ lanterns while I carry un up on deck.”

So saying, Bill lifted Edward Bertram up in his strong arms, and carried him forward.

“ What will captain be saying about this business?” remarked Jack, as he followed with the two lanterns. “ How’ll he take it, say you?”

“ Dunno,” was the short answer, and then Bill had reached the ladder, and he sang out for a rope, which he fastened round Ned under his arms, and then, telling the astonished men above to haul away fair and softly, he came up the ladder himself behind the apparently lifeless schoolboy. Of course, the moment Ned was laid on the deck, a crowd instantly collected round him. Crowds always do collect when there is anything to be seen out of the ordinary way, just as readily at sea as on land; the only difference is in the things to be seen, porpoises instead of Punch and Judy shows, and men overboard instead of a house on fire. But Bill had small sympathy with do-nothing crowds and their curiosity. He only left Ned to be stared at just long enough to undo the knot of the rope from about him, and then he picked him up again, and marched off with him to the captain’s cabin, leaving Jack to tell as long a yarn as he chose.

“ What in the name of goodness and patience have you got there, Anderson?” exclaimed Captain Pender, as Bill Anderson stood in the doorway with his burden, awaiting permission to enter.

“ A young lad, captain; found un nigh dead down in the hold.”

So saying, the sailor came forward, and laid young Bertram down upon the captain's couch.

"A young scoundrel," said the captain, after looking at him carefully for a few moments. "Evidently a fine young gentleman, from his clothes and his hands. Took a dislike to his A, B, C, I suppose, and thought life at sea would be all play. We'll teach him differently."

"If so be he lives," said Bill, grimly. "'Pears to me there's none too many planks atween him an' death, if so be ye mean to leave un alone."

"No, no, you are right," said the captain, quickly, and with a changed tone. "For the sake of his mother, if he's got one, if for nothing else, we must try to keep him alive. What a mercy that mistake was made about the flour. Go to the cook and get a cup of broth from him, and hurry back."

While the sailor was gone, Captain Pender busied himself earnestly, and with no ungentle fingers, in efforts to restore Bertram to consciousness.

"Poor fellow, poor boy!" he murmured once or twice, as he looked at the parched lips and the sunken eyes, whose lids began to quiver with returning life just as the gruff-spoken, friendly sailor returned with the warm broth. It was a difficult matter to get the first spoonful swallowed, but the second and third disappeared more speedily, and after the sixth, Ned opened his eyes, and asked—

"Where am I?"

"Where ye're better off than ye deserve," grunted Bill. "Open your mouth, and dinna talk."

Ned did as he was bid; and when he had taken as much of the broth as his nurses thought good for him he fell asleep, awaking refreshed and strengthened, but still very hungry, and quite ready for the second meal of broth and bread that stood ready for him.

While he was eating it, recollection began to come back

with returning strength. He remembered his escape from school, smuggling himself on board. He remembered vividly all his agony of suffering in the awful prison of the hold; but there memory failed him, and he exceedingly wished to ask for the particulars of his escape, and how he reached his present comfortable position. The only person, however, in the cabin with him was a stern-looking gentleman, who had never once looked at him since saying, "Drink this," when the cup was put into his hand on awaking. Outside, a good many people looked at him furtively, now and again, through the window or the half-open door. But they gave him no opportunity to speak to them, especially as they darted away out of sight every time the solemn, silent man moved. At last, however, his suspense came to an end. The stern-looking man, who was no other than Captain Pender, rose, and, going to the door, called in Jack Hughes and Bill Anderson. Having marshalled them in front of Ned, he said, without any preface—

"Now, young gentleman, since you seem to have recovered your senses, you and I will come to an explanation, if you please. These two men found you in hiding down in the hold, like a sneak. Pray, how came you there?"

At the word "sneak," the hot blood had rushed into Ned's cheeks, and he raised his eyes hastily, but they fell as quickly before the steady gaze that he met fixed upon them. His lips moved, but he made no answer.

"It is well that there is some shame left in you," said that quiet, stern voice, speaking again after a pause. "You dare not tell me how you came there, so I will tell you. You came there like a thief, young gentleman. You *stole* away from your home, and you have *stolen* a passage so far on my vessel, and you intended, no doubt, to *steal* your meat and drink throughout the whole of your voyage."

There was another burning flush on Ned's cheeks, and again he tried in vain to speak, or to raise his eyes.

"If I am judging you wrongly, I shall be glad to hear it," said the captain. "Perhaps, after all, it was a mere whim of yours to creep stealthily on board like a thief, and you have your money with you to pay your fare, as everyone else has done. Tell me, how much money have you brought with you?"

"None," muttered Bertram, in a scarcely audible whisper.

"None—Anderson, Hughes, you hear. Those listening outside can hear; he has stolen a place on board this ship; he has brought no money with him to pay for the long passage, nor for the food that he, of course, meant to get out of some of us, somehow. He is judged out of his own mouth as a thief, and as I don't see that I am called upon to give him, or any other disreputable thief, board and lodging for nothing, just because they may think they have managed to make me do so, why, I judge the young rascal to be strung up to the mast-head, and hung."

Edward Bertram was no coward. Indeed it had been well known at school that he could dare more and endure more than any one of his companions; but he had lately gone through enough to shake the courage of the bravest of well-tried warriors on life's war path, and besides, there was something peculiarly dreadful in the unexpectedness of the harsh judgment, and the dreariness of having been rescued from one death, only to be consigned to another equally awful and still more sudden. His face turned white as when superstitious Jack shuddered at it while he lay swooning in his hiding-hole, his limbs trembled, and he fell on his knees before Captain Pender.

"Oh! spare me! spare me!" he cried in a tone of bitter agony. "I will work; I will be your servant; black your boots, anything, only spare me."



CHAPTER III.

REPRIEVED.

“ **Y**OR’S a mussy me, husband,” whispered a woman **A** amongst the crowd of emigrants who had gathered outside the captain’s door, in defiance of all ships’ rules and regulations, to see “the dead and done-for lad who had come to life again.” “ Lor’s a mussy me, could the captain—and he always so kind, too, to us all—in real lawful law and right hang the poor lad ?”

“ O’ coarse not, sil-ly,” returned her husband, contemptuously. “ Captain Pender, he be only givin’ th’ youngster a bit of a fright like. An’ I don’t doubt he deserves it. But hearken ye, there’s more comin’.”

As Bertram’s heartrending cry burst forth, and he fell on his knees, the captain turned hastily aside, and made a great deal more fuss than was at all necessary over taking a pinch of snuff. That ceremony ended, however, he came back to Bertram, and, taking him by the arm, he drew him up on to his feet, while he said rather huskily—

“ Come, come, my man, I thought from the look of your face to find more spirit in you. The sea gives folks a touch of lawlessness, no doubt, but not quite to the extent of hanging up stowaways, even though they may richly deserve the punishment. Should Providence give us a safe run, I’ll land

you at Sydney right enough, with the rest of my passengers, unless I find you a more proper customer for Botany Bay. Meantime, as I prefer honest folks to rogues about me, you will be a prisoner in a place more light and airy, but a good deal smaller than the hold, and there you will remain alone for the remainder of the voyage."

"Better hang un outright, captain," growled Bill. "He's had enough o' lonesomeness to last a body one while."

"Silence, Anderson. This age is a good deal too fond of teaching lads that scoundrelly actions are finer than honest ones; this youngster shall learn that my opinion is different. Take him aft."

Anderson paused a moment; but there was no sign of relenting on the firm, set face of Captain Pender. The man looked troubled, but implicit, prompt obedience is the sailor's first law, and with a gruff, "Come along, young master," he led the way from the captain's cabin to a narrow cupboard of a place down below, just big enough to swing a hammock, and no more. Tears started to Edward Bertram's eyes as he saw a strong key in the man's hand.

"Am I to be locked in?" he asked, anxiously.

"Bound to be, sir. Them's the cap'n's orders. But heart up, sir; even a voyage to Australy don't last for ever. And, after all, your sufferin's won't be nothing to them as you'll have made your poor mother bear."

"I haven't got any mother," said Ned, setting himself down on an old box, which was the only seat afforded him.

"Well, your father, then."

"I haven't got any father."

Bill stared at the young prisoner for a moment, and then hastily turned away, put the key in the door on the outside, and locked him in. The next minute there was a tap at the captain's door.

"Come in. Well, Anderson, what now?"

"The key, sir."

"All right. Put it down. That will do."

Still Bill stood in the doorway. The captain looked up impatiently.

"Well; is there anything more?"

"T' lad's name is Edward Bertram, an' he hanna nor father nor mither."

Having blurted out that information, Bill stepped back, and was about to shut the door, when Captain Pender called after him—

"See that the prisoner has his meals regularly. I give him into your charge."

Captain Pender had good right to say that he loved uprightness, for he was honest as the day himself; but had he thought Bertram's trick as admirable and clever as the boy had once considered it himself, he would still have had fair reason to be annoyed at it. The owners of the vessel wanted to make as large profits as they possibly could out of it, and one of their ways of doing so was to cut down the provisions to the lowest possible figure. Each day of the voyage had been reckoned, and the supply of food apportioned to it, as if each day had been insured beforehand to be favourable, and no such things as contrary winds or rough seas were to be feared as hindrances. Under these niggardly circumstances, even one unexpected mouth was an additional anxiety.

Two or three days passed on, during which Captain Pender kept firm to his resolution not to relent towards poor Ned, very much to the surprise of everyone on board. Bill got in the habit of spending all his leisure time with his back against the locked door, talking aloud of all that was going on on board the ship, and spinning yarns. It was against orders to hold conversation with Mr. Bertram; but there were no orders against thinking out loud.

"There!" exclaimed the sailor, one afternoon, in a tone of

impatience, "if that isn't the second needle I've broken over this sleeve. Truth be, my fingers are too clumsy for needlework."

"Hand your jacket in to me," said a voice inside, eagerly. "I can work first-rate; had to do lots when I was fag. Pray let me mend it for you. It's awful sitting here all day and all night, on and on like this, doing nothing. I begin to wish that Captain Pender had really hung me."

"Do you so, my lad?" said a clear, ringing voice, which was certainly not that of husky, good-hearted Bill Anderson.

Before Ned could speak again, the key turned in the lock, and Captain Pender himself stood before him, with a half-smile upon his face.

"So, young man, you wish I had really hung you, do you?"

"He's only beginning to wish it," muttered Bill, with a grim smile.

"Yes, please, sir," said Bertram, bravely raising his head, and looking up frankly. "I was only beginning to wish it, and now I don't wish it at all; for I do think you will forgive me when I tell you how sorry I am for having got on board in a cheaty way. I never looked at it in that light before; and I do think that I may truly say I never cheated anyone else in my life. I've been in many scrapes, but I've never cheated, never stolen, and never told a lie."

Captain Pender looked earnestly at the handsome, open young face before him, and then, laying his hand on his shoulder, he said gravely, "I believe you, and will trust you. You are free. But remember, I reserve to myself the power to order you back here should I choose, or see due cause. However, I may as well tell you at once that I have shortened my punishment somewhat more than I intended, because I believe there is a threatening of foul weather in the air, in which case you may have deeper cause to regret your stolen passage than any I can give you. Even," he added, in a low voice, "to the repetition of your experiences in the hold."

Ned shuddered. But all dark memories, and fears for the future, were forgotten before he had been ten minutes on deck. Freedom and fresh air raised his spirits to a degree that almost alarmed his self-constituted guardian, Bill Anderson.

“Dinna ye go to do anything wild-like, sir,” he muttered, in friendly warning.

He had hardly spoken, when his warning seemed alike necessary and useless. A piercing scream rang through the vessel, and at the same instant Ned had flung off his jacket, kicked off his boots, jumped on to the taffrail, and thence plunged into the sea, over which brooded a purple-hued, ominous calm. Bill looked over the side of the vessel, where a woman stood wringing her hands and moaning—

“My child! my child!”

He could see nothing but a little mass of brown, seaweed-looking stuff, streaming on the top of the water. For this, however, Ned Bertram was striking out gallantly.

“He’s got her, he’s got her!” shrieked half-a-dozen voices excitedly, as the boy made a clutch at the brown mass. Once it eluded him, and floated further off. He swam on, made another effort; this time he grasped it tight, and turned to swim back with his burden. A rope was flung out to him, Bill let himself down by another, and as soon as the swimmer drew near, he took the half-drowned child from his arm, handed it up to the mother, and then helped Ned, who was rather exhausted with his adventure, to climb on deck again.

“He’s got the right stuff in him, hey, Anderson?” said Captain Pender, who had been attracted to that end of the vessel by the unusual bustle, and now stood with a pleased expression looking after the boy as he went to change his own dripping garments for one of the innumerable suits pressed upon his acceptance.

“We’ll make him worth his salt, I think, Anderson.”

“Ay, ay, sir. But he needna go to takin’ the deeds out o’

his better's hands all the same. An' I'll be telling him that another time."

From that hour young Edward Bertram was treated on board more as though he were a prince in disguise than a scapegrace runaway, a penniless young beggar living on extorted charity. And the treatment agreed with him wonderfully. He grew visibly taller and broader and stronger every day. For the first time in his life he felt as though he had found a home. Its roughness he did not care about.

"All the same," he grumbled to his big, burly confidant, Bill, one day, "I do wish Captain Pender would give me some regular employment. I hate to feel that I'm eating my head off, so to speak, day after day, and doing nothing to pay for my food. If he wants to go on punishing me, he's doing it right enough."

"Pity you didn't think of all that, sir, afore ye coom aboard."

"Of course it was, Bill. You don't know that a bit better than I do myself. But, you see, the boys in the books I best like reading never do think, so what was there to make me?—except when I was learning my lessons."

"Please, Mr. Bertram, mother says will you be so very good as show her how to make bread, as you did Mrs. Johnson, yesterday?"

Ned laughed as he looked down at the small urchin sent to him with this message from the emigrants' quarters. So did the sailor.

"May I make so bold as ask, sir, how you learnt the baking?"

"My father's trade," answered Ned, flippantly.

Grave-minded, pious Bill looked solemn. "You said your father was an officer, sir, in His Majesty King George's service, and that you never told a lie."

The colour deepened in Ned's cheeks. For a moment he

felt indignant with his strict monitor, then his better nature prevailed, and, choking back the passionate words that had risen to his lips, he said quietly—

“I beg your pardon, Anderson ; but you know I only said that in fun. My father was an officer ; still, you know, he may have learnt how to make bread at school, as I did.”

“Bless me, sir,” was the astonished exclamation, “ye never mean to tell me those are the sort o’ things gentlemen learn at their grand schools, tailorin’ and bakin’ !”

“But indeed they do, though,” said Ned, laughing—“at least fags do. Hot rolls for breakfast for the monitors—rather heavy, you know, but very good with lots of butter and jam in the middle. And then, Bill—oh ! the hot sausages and mashed potatoes ! I won’t mind cooking you some now, Bill, if you’ll provide the materials, and give me the leavings.”

Bill rubbed the back of his hand across his mouth, and walked off quickly to help hoist a sail, as though he thought it best to try if active employment would aid him to banish useless longings. If Bill had a weakness, it was for fried sausages, well browned and hot. Ned ran off to the emigrants’ quarters, where his welcome made some amends for other disagreeables.

There were over two hundred emigrants on board, forty of them being children. There was not proper room for above a hundred and fifty, and, in spite of all the efforts of the captain and officers of the ship, between decks discomfort reigned supreme. The men’s department was not so bad ; they and their belongings did not require so much room ; but the women’s quarters were most intensely wretched, encumbered, as they were, with goods and chattels intended for home-furnishing in the unknown land.

“Worse than my uncle’s pigsties,” muttered young Bertram, his heart swelling with pity for the poor, pale-looking little children who crowded round him the moment he appeared. The same tender-heartedness that bore a thrashing for a weary-

headed little schoolmate, had led the boy to try to relieve the dolefulness of the long sea-voyage for the unfortunate little creatures now in his neighbourhood. On deck they were terribly in the way, and in perpetual danger of getting drowned by falling overboard ; and down below they were half-stifled for want of air. It was a choice of miseries, and the mothers never ceased to bless the day that sent "the young master" to lessen their troubles, and ease some of the weariness of their children. Besides, he did ever so many useful things—put plaisters on bruised foreheads, stopped fights, borrowed Bill's clasp-knife, and transformed odds and ends of wood into dolls' tables and chairs, tied up rotten old hammocks with bits of string, with an ingenuity that excited the liveliest admiration, and now he had crowned his popularity by betraying a perfect genius for cookery—at least, what passed for genius amongst his ignorant companions.

"An' blessin's on your honour's head, an' how did ye make out to learn?" asked a poor Irishwoman one day as she stood watching him.

"Chiefly by getting a rap over the head with a stick pretty often," was the laughing answer. And then Edward Bertram went on feeding a little invalid Paddy with some mashed potato, which he had got the ship's cook to let him warm up and brown to a nicety.

"I don't know how it is, but somehow that impudent young rascal has managed to get the complete run of the ship—to go where he likes and do what he likes," said the captain, meeting him with the plate in his hand. "I'm afraid he may be rather presuming, and over bold."

"May be," said the chief mate, a straightforward Scotchman ; "but I'll not ask to see a lad more to my liking between the poles. That countryman of mine, Anderson, says he's fretting to have some work given him to do. Why, he does as much as any two of us on board already. Wherever there's

hearty work or hearty play going on, you are sure to find that young chap in the midst of it. And as for his bright face, and the frank, honest look in his eyes, why, they're as good as the sea-breeze itself."

"Well, he has evidently won a warm friend in you, Griffin, at any rate," laughed Captain Pender, with a look of relief. "I confess I have taken a liking to the boy myself; but it is wiser to err on the side of strictness than laxity at sea, and it would not do to allow anyone else to imitate the liberty of action that Bertram has assumed."

"Certainly not. But it is not everyone on board who has endured three days and more of starvation in a pitch dark dungeon."

"That is no reason in his favour," said the captain, with a smile; "but I'll not go into that question with you, Griffin. I see your heart is engaged on the lad's side, and when that is the case, argument is useless."

"My reason is engaged quite as much as my heart. Young Bertram is steady, keen-sighted, fearless, and upright; and will make a man worth knowing one of these fine days."

"I trust he may live to prove you right."

"Amen to that."





CHAPTER IV.

TOO LATE, OR TOO EARLY?

EDWARD BERTRAM'S experiences as school-fag, and a considerable share of mother wit, rapidly enabled him to gain a great reputation, and not only his hands but his brains were frequently taxed to the uttermost. Mrs. Johnson's friend was about to claim the powers of both now. While he mixed flour and water for her, she lost no time in beginning a whispered conversation with him, and Ned soon found that the desired lesson in biscuit-making was only a pretext for something much more important.

"Why don't you tell Captain Pender?" asked Ned at last, with a very grave face, when the woman paused in her communication, but from want of breath rather than because she considered her subject exhausted.

"Bless you, sir! 'Tisn't for the likes o' me to go speaking up to the captain. Nor by token I don't suppose he'd heed it if I did. He'd shrug his shoulders, belike, and say I'd dreamt it, or it was another of our scares."

A smile flitted over Ned's face at that suggestion, it was such a very possible one; and as he remembered some of the outbursts of screams attendant upon causeless panics, and the repeated scenes of needless confusion that had occurred on board during the past few weeks, he felt somewhat reassured

as to the present cause of anxiety. At the same time, he decided to keep his eyes open.

"You see, sir," muttered the woman, looking carefully round her to see that she was not overheard—"you see a death by fire at sea must be a real awful one, and it isn't, to say, like another."

"No, indeed," said Ned, as he walked off to think. His cogitations at length ended, he went on deck, and presented himself to the captain.

"If you please, sir, shall you be disengaged soon, for a few minutes?"

"Disengaged? Well, I'm not especially busy just now, at any rate not so busy but what I can give you a share of attention. I see nothing to prevent my giving a bit of my thoughts to anyone with such a solemn face."

"If you please, sir, a bit of your thoughts and a share of your attention is not enough. And I cannot speak to you out here, where we may be overheard."

"Umph!" ejaculated Captain Pender, opening his eyes very wide, and staring at the lad. After a look round the deck, he prepared to lead the way to his cabin.

"Is it anything you have seen, anything you want, or anything you have heard, that you wish to consult with me about, my lad?"

"Something I have heard."

"From Anderson! He should have come to me himself. He deserves a reprimand for speaking to you first."

"No, no, sir, no," exclaimed Ned, quickly. "You are making a great mistake, sir. This is nothing to do with Anderson. It's something I've heard in the women's quarters."

He had scarcely time to finish his sentence before the captain stopped short, with a long, loud burst of laughter. Giving a great, sounding thump to his leg, he exclaimed in a voice expressive of relief and hearty amusement—

"How could I make such a fool of myself as to be so taken in! Why, my boy, you must have thought this was the 1st of April. Fancy coming to me with some mare's nest discovered in those women's quarters. It's bad enough to have deputations of themselves coming upon one at all times and seasons; but if you are going to take upon yourself an appointment as their advocate and messenger, woe betide me! However," added the captain more quietly, "you need not look so offended, Bertram, for, after all, I may confess that I believed some of these tales myself the first few days. Whatever it was you had to say, keep it for this evening. It is pretty sure to be some good joke that I shall enjoy to hear over my coffee."

"It may be too late to hear it then, sir."

"All right, then it must be, for it is too early to hear it now," said Captain Pender coldly, as he turned away, and went back to his former post.

Ned went off to Bill Anderson. On his way he met Jack, the man who had been Bill's cautious companion the day he was rescued by them from the hold. The big sailor was looking very troubled, and as pale as the deep bronze of his complexion would permit.

"What's the matter with you, Jack?" asked Ned, as he came up to him. "To look at you, one would think that you must have seen a good half-dozen of your friends the ghosts, and been warned to pay them a visit besides."

"I have, sir, I have," muttered the man in a tone of undisguised horror, and with trembling lips—"I have so."

"What!" exclaimed Ned, making an involuntary step back from the man, who, he thought, must have gone mad at last, with his gloomy fancies and superstitious fears. "You mean to tell me seriously, Jack, that you have seen some ghosts?"

"No—not seen any yet," was the answer, in the same awestruck tone, and with a swift shuddering glance over his

shoulder, as though he feared to see one of them in the act of making a clutch at him. "I've not seen one yet, Mr. Bertram, only I've—I've—been warned—with a curse—that I shall go—go to them—myself."

"Ugh! Jack," returned Ned, with irrepressible contempt. "If you were a school-boy, Jack, you'd get called the biggest baby out, and a lot more names, too. Besides, don't you know the old saying, 'Curses, like chickens, come home to roost'? So it's the one who spoke the curses, not the one who heard them, who'll have to visit the ghosts, if any one does."

"Do you think so, sir," anxiously.

But Ned had passed on. He had a boy's impatient scorn for the nervous fears of superstition. God-fearing, calm-minded Anderson was much more to his liking, and just now he was particularly anxious to have the consolation of his society.

However, his first remark, when he found him, had nothing to do with his own affairs. Throwing himself down beside Bill, he said, with a laugh—

"What an awfully weak stupid that big giant Jack is, Anderson. He deserves to be made to go about in a dunce's cap, or, better still, a fool's cap and bells. It would almost serve him properly if some one did give him a good fright some day."

"Well, Mr. Bertram, that is what some one has done not an hour since. And indeed, then, though I'm not greatly given to fearing men's words myself, it did seem to me as if my blood curdled and my flesh creped like, at the awful curses and threats—for me and Jack in especial, and all the rest in general—poured out o' that wretched fellow, Storton, like boilin' grog out o' a wide-mouthed jug."

"Storton!" repeated Ned, with eager interest. "What about Storton, Bill?"

"Hey! lots, sir. But nothing for a young gentleman like

you to be asking about or hearing of. It's bad enough for them as can't help themselves to have to do with him. We'll have a yarn, Mr. Bertram, if you please. You tell one first out o' your books, and I'll cap it with a real one."

"All right. But first, Anderson, I *am* going to ask you again what about Storton, in spite of what you say. For I have already heard something that makes me think it will be safer for all on board if I hear more."

A glance at Ned's earnest face soon convinced the sailor that the boy was not actuated by any mere idle and mischievous curiosity.

"Well, sir, if you have any real reason for your question, of course that alters the case. But the fact o' the matter is, that Storton be an up-and-down ugly customer o' all sides; an' though I'm not afeerd o' his gleaming eyes, as Jack is, I'd liefer forget un than remember him. I'd a'most as soon swim in company wi' a shark. Look here," and unrolling a great red and blue cotton handkerchief that was bound about his hand, he displayed it to Ned.

"What ugly wounds, Bill. You should get them dressed."

"So I mean, sir, directly I'm off duty; for they are ugly wounds, as you say, an' it were Storton's teeth as give them to me. If I hadn't had strength to choke un off, he'd have had the piece out. He's a regular brute, sir, sometimes. You know he's an escaped forger, slipped through for want of proof; but he's as savage as he's cunning when he's drunk."

"So it seems," said Ned; and then he told as much as he dared of some information that had been given him by the woman respecting a villainous plan said to have been formed by this same Storton.

"Have you telled all this to the captain, sir?"

"He won't hear it, because a woman told me."

"And quite right too, sir. It's just got up for a scare. It's onpossible."

"I don't believe it," said Ned. "What's at the back of the place where Storton's confined now?"

"Oh, casks and barrels; tricky sort o' merchandise booked out to Sydney to the Governor. 'Hospital' 's marked on one in big white letters. I saw that when I stowed un; but I know no more, and few on board knows as much."

"And who are those few who do?"

"Well, captain for one, of course, I suppose. And the mates, and me, and Jack—and that thief Storton, and Mrs. Downing's husband."

"And yet you won't believe Mrs. Downing's story, and the captain won't hear it!"

"Certain sure not. Not a critter could get at these casks—spirits or not spirits in them—wi'out a sight o' hard work as 'ud let all in the ship know what they were up to."

Ned found it useless to speak further. He left Bill, and, drawing off his shoes in a quiet corner, he crept softly down to the neighbourhood of Storton's dungeon. Looking round to see that he was not observed, as he reached the last limit of the light that struggled down there, he plunged into the darkness that surrounded the ship's prison cell, and in two minutes discovered that Storton certainly was free of the manacles, and was indulging in his favourite habit of drinking, whether he could get at the contents of those casks or not.

Ned crept back to daylight, and then flew once more to the captain. He and the chief mate, Macgregor, and Anderson, were together, and they all listened to the boy now, when he rushed forward with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. Still the captain was sceptical.

"I implore you to believe me," exclaimed Ned. "I declare that Storton is free of the handcuffs now. That part of the woman's tale is true, at any rate."

"It's onpossible," exclaimed Bill, "I put un on myself."

"Still, men have been known to get free," said the chief

mate, musingly. "There would be no harm, as Bertram says, in seeing that he is safe."

"Ah! you are sure to take our young stowaway's part," laughed the captain. "Well, go, by all means, but don't expect my company on the fool's errand."

That permission was enough. The three started off at once, Ned going direct to the inner edge of the darkness around the prison cell, while the others went for a key and a lantern.

Bertram did not have long to wait for his companions, but each moment seemed a minute as he stood about three yards distant from the small prison, within which all appeared now to be perfect stillness. He dared not approach any nearer, for fear of giving a premature warning to the miscreant, and he was thankful enough when the chief mate and Anderson made their appearance. When they were within two feet of him they stopped, while Bill put the key between his teeth, and, holding the lantern in one hand, fumbled in his pockets with the other for his tinder-box and sulphur matches. Ned's carelessness would be all thrown away if that noisy flint and steel were to be struck together half-a-dozen times, just there, to get a light; and as this thought occurred to him, he muttered a sharp "Stop!"

A startled exclamation burst from the sailor's lips, who was quite unaware of the boy's close neighbourhood. Down clattered the key; irrepressible cries of annoyance broke from Ned and the chief mate; an echo to them was heard from within the prison walls, and then there followed a tremendous clinking and clattering of chains. Mr. Macgregor darted forward, and showered a series of thundering raps on the door.

"What are you about in there, you rascal?"

No answer, but the clinking and clattering of chains continued more vigorously than ever.

"Find that key, Anderson—Bertram," shouted the mate, impatiently. "Find it directly, and bring it here."

"Ay, ay, sir, as soon as we can," said Anderson, dolefully. "But I'll be having to get a light first, I'm afeerd, for I'm thinking it's got down a chink in the boards. I've felt all round, and can't come upon it nowheres."

A laugh came from within the prison, mingling with the other sounds, which still further exasperated the mate. He recommenced hammering on the door, and shouted again his former question, "What are you about in there, you villain, you? what are you about in there?"

"You had better come in and see," was the taunting reply. "A little society would be a charming interruption to my solitude. At the same time, since you are so very anxious to know my present occupation, I don't mind gratifying you. I am trying to get free; and, in spite of any orders you or the captain may issue to the contrary, I shall go on doing that till I have succeeded, or am let out."

On the receipt of this coolly given bit of information, Mr. Macgregor went back to Ned, looking very disconcerted. "I say, my boy, that does not sound like being free already, according to your assertion."

Ned's only answer was to clench his hands impatiently, and mutter, "When is Anderson coming back with that lantern?"

Two lights were brought at last; the key was found, and hooked up with some difficulty, and the prison-door was opened.

There lay Storton on the ground, kicking and plunging about, and struggling violently with his hands and arms, but in every respect just as he had been left between two and three hours ago. The iron bands were still round his ankles, and fastened securely together by the eighteen-inch-long chain. And the handcuffs, which hung from the chains of the iron band that encompassed the mast, were very visible upon his swollen wrists. He looked a little less ferocious, but a good deal more insolent, and supremely contemptuous. As Bill stooped

down to try the security of his fastenings, the prisoner said coolly—

“Ah, my man, hope your hand smarts a bit, hey? I’ve got a score to clear off with you for the choking you gave me. I hope I won’t keep you waiting long. And you, you young sneak,” to Edward Bertram, “what do you want to come prying about here for? Half-starved once upon a time, were you? I’ll take care that you are never half-starved again. What! going away so soon, all of you? How unsociable! Good-day to you, or good-night, since you are so unmannerly as to carry your light with you.”

“Well,” questioned Captain Pender, when his mate, the sailor, and Ned returned to him, “what news? How did you find Storton?”

“The greatest villain unhung, but fast enough,” growled Macgregor, looking rather sheepish.

“What did I tell you?” said his friend, laughing. “Your great fault, my dear fellow, is being too credulous.”

“He has not shown himself so this time,” said Ned, excitedly. “Whatever Storton may be now, I declare he was free of the irons—of the handcuffs, at any rate—when I came to you half-an-hour ago. I declare it, on my honour.”

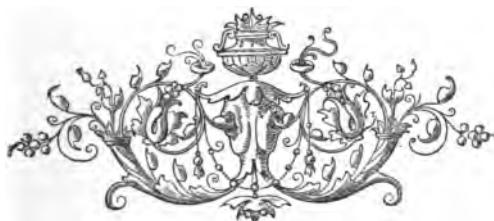
This time, instead of showing any anger or impatience, Captain Pender fixed his eyes intently on the eager face upturned to him, and, as he did so, his expression betrayed some anxiety.

Ned’s eyes were brilliant with intense excitement, and his cheeks were crimson. Meeting the enquiring gaze fixed upon him, he exclaimed again—“Yes, sir, I declare it, on my honour.”

“All right, my boy,” said the captain at last, in a soothing tone, as though speaking to a sick child; “you have done your duty in coming to tell me, and now, if I were you, I’d turn in for an hour or two, and get a good sleep. You look rather done up.”

With a sigh, that was almost a groan, Ned went off, and the captain, turning to the others, said gravely—

“ I’m afraid that lad’s confinement and sufferings in the hold told upon his constitution more seriously than we have hitherto supposed. He’s pretty evidently booked for a bad illness now, I fear, and some cock-and bull story told him by those meddling emigrants seems to have been the last straw that his over-wrought nerves could bear. You, Anderson, give an eye to him an hour or so hence, and if he still looks as feverish, let the doctor know.”





CHAPTER V.

THE DREAD VERIFIED.

WHEN Edward Bertram was dismissed to his hammock, as related in the last chapter, it need scarcely be said, perhaps, that he did not obey the captain's kindly-meant advice.

He knew now that his last hope had failed of getting any help against Storton's machinations. Any further disclosures or entreaties would be thrown away upon Mr. Macgregor, and Bill was as likely as not to strap him into his bed as the victim of delirium if he made any more attempts to influence him.

Under these circumstances he had himself alone to depend upon, to discover some means by which to avert the ship's destruction.

So far from being re-assured by finding Storton again handcuffed, the circumstance only tended to convince him still more strongly of the miscreant's power and cunning skill, and he felt as though every moment that the prisoner was allowed to spend unwatched added to the threatened danger.

For the third time he made his way to the lower part of the ship, where the gloom and darkness could only be surpassed by that of the hold itself, and to which no one came, as a rule, who could keep away.

With greater care and quietness, if possible, than ever, Ned

slipped down into his former position against the door, the key of which he now held firmly clutched in his hand. That key was the solitary coadjutor he had secured for the forthcoming struggle in which he expected before long to be engaged.

In a fit of absent-mindedness, very unusual with Bill Anderson, he had allowed the boy to lock the door when they came out of the small dungeon, and to keep the key, which Ned took care he should not be reminded of by seeing it, for he hastily hid it away in his pocket. That key would enable him to come to close quarters with the prisoner, and if the worst came to the worst, that would have to be his last desperate step.

Meantime, Ned felt very wretched. Nothing short of the awfulness of the present case would have prevailed upon him to act the part of a spy. He would infinitely rather have denounced the forger openly, and run the risk of any sufferings the man's ingenious vengeance might have endeavoured to inflict.

However, that was not to be, and with a more heartfelt prayer than any perhaps he had ever uttered in his life before, he set himself to perform the duty that happened to have fallen to him to fulfil.

When Ned first bent his ear against the keyhole, he could hear nothing but the man's rather heavy breathing. But after a few minutes the chains clinked once more, and Storton muttered—

“Con-found it! I wish the swollen veins would be quick and shrink again. The idea of those prying creatures coming where they weren't wanted, and giving me all this trouble, not to speak of the waste of time in getting at the good liquor.”

What his words signified Ned was not sufficiently experienced to understand, but it was very clear that he was not yet so far again at liberty as to be dangerous, and the silence, darkness,

and weariness of inactive excitement began to have its natural effect upon the watcher in making him very drowsy. Ned must have been actually dozing for a few minutes, when, providentially for him, a rattle of the chains suddenly startled him wide awake again. It was only just in time. For a few moments terror almost overwhelmed him.

The danger this time was not from within the prison-walls, but from without. There, standing in the light, just without the line of darkness, stood the man Downing, a drunken, bullying fellow, only less annoying and less to be feared in his wickedness than Stortont because he was a coward.

He stood looking furtively around him, to see if there were any observers, before vanishing into the obscurity, as Bertram had recently done himself; then he disappeared. He was only three or four yards away, and that distance was rapidly lessening between the ruthless man and the trembling boy. There was not the sound of any other creature on board to be heard. The mingled sounds of wind and waves would drown any scream before it reached other ears than those of the two brutal-hearted confederates.

Ned had taken up his present position with the firm resolve in his brave young heart to die, if need were, to save the many hundred other lives on board; but to die in vain would be a piled-up agony too great for human resignation. And yet he *could not* move to get away. Closer and closer he drew himself up against the door, crouching there, waiting—so it seemed to him—to be murdered; and the soft clinking of the chains went on, as though their wearer were taking things easily just now, and still those stealthy footsteps came on inch by inch, nearer, as the boy felt, to his slight throat.

Just as he fancied he could feel the man's thick breathing upon his forehead, and his heart leapt up with a wild prayer for preservation from his awful peril, a voice came from inside the prison, and the oncoming footsteps stopped.

"Who goes there, pray? more Paul Prys coming to see how a gentleman looks in bracelets? Pray walk in, ladies and—"

"Hist yer foolin'," growled the man outside; "do yer want every critter aboard to come crowdin' 'ere to see what's the row?"

"Nay, indeed, you well-beloved Downing," in a lower tone. "I did not know it was you, my charming, elegant-speaking chum; but take care how you come on, or you'll roll full tilt against the door, I can hear by your voice. Turn right about to the left, and then two steps on; right about back, and two steps, and if you stoop low enough you'll about hit the mark. Mind you, pull out the nails cautiously, or the board will fall in with a bang."

"No, it won't, no more nor it's done other times; not if you hold on," was the snappish retort. "I suppose yer ain't too fine a gentleman ter do that much."

"By no means, my dear friend; but, unfortunately, freedom and I have parted company just now. My hands and the lower part of the mast that runs through this dog-hole persist at the present moment in remaining at very close quarters."

"What! yer don't mean, after all yer boastin', that ye're fastened up still? That's what comes o' trustin' the likes o' ye; an' I ha' paid this risky v'yage for naught, ye unhung good-for-naught."

"Don't use bad language, my friend, and don't grumble. I shall be free to fill your bottle for you again in a minute, if you don't rouse my wrath against you, and agitate me so that my veins swell again. I have been at liberty once to enjoy myself, but unexpected visitors had the impertinence to intrude themselves upon me, and I had to get myself into my bracelets again."

"Law sakes! An' how did yer do it before they pounced upon yer?"

"Easily enough, as it happened—thanks to that bigoted old idiot, Anderson. He did me such a splendid good turn that I'd really spare him a drop out of our cask if circumstances permitted."

"Which they don't. But this is the first I've heerd o' love bein' lost awixt you two. How come that old Grumps to show yer favour?"

"Oh, he didn't do it on purpose. Don't frighten yourself. You know the prejudiced old fool won't have anything to do with the friction matches. I believe he thinks they are a new invention of the devil's to burn the world, and so he sticks—antiquated old idiot!—to his tinder-box; and, what with the noise of trying to get a light out of that and dropping the key, I'd loads of warnings, and was as trim and tight as you please when at last the door opened, and old Bill and the first mate thrust their prying heads in, followed by that young sneak, Bertram. And that reminds me, Downing, if you've the good luck to get that rat in a cosy corner, just oblige me by twisting your fingers round his gentlemanly, lady-white neck, please. I believe he smells something."

"I wish *I* did," growled Downing, who by this time had drawn out four nails that kept in its place a narrow bit of planking of the wall, about eighteen inches in length, which he had dropped very cautiously down on the inside of the cell.

"Ain't yer out o' them irons yet?" he muttered, putting his head in at the hole. "Do be quick. I'm a'most certain I heard something, and some spy'll be around before I get so much as a smell o' the liquor."

If he had not been so intent on his own wishes, and Storton had not made an opportune rattle with the chains, he would have been more than almost, he would have been quite certain that he heard something, and that something close at hand, too.

Ned's cramped position was growing insupportable to him,

and the murderous wishes respecting him expressed by the prisoner made it still more desirable that he should endeavour to make himself a little more secure from the clutches of his unscrupulous enemies.

When the light of Bill Anderson's lantern, an hour or so earlier, had enabled him to see the surroundings of the prison-cabin a little more clearly, he had noticed to the right a great pile of trusses of hay—the fodder, no doubt, for the two cows on board and the sheep. If only he could drag himself along the walls of the cell, and reach that pile without detection, he felt that he should be able to provide himself with a comparatively safe post of observation.

He never for one moment thought of stealing away. Ultimate escape he had quite given up hoping for ; but he valued his life highly, and, while the wretched drinker Storton was willing to die, in a drunken sleep, so that he could indulge a drunkard's mad revenge, the brave-hearted schoolboy was willing to die if by his death he could be the means of saving other lives. But if he were killed now, thus prematurely, by these miserable confederates, they would be left more at liberty than ever to fulfil their deliberate schemes of wholesale crime.

For one moment Ned thought that it was all up with him at once. He had been gradually leaning more and more heavily against the rough wooden door, and when, as a preliminary to further proceedings, he lifted himself quickly away from it, it gave out a sudden succession of creaks and jars, only partially smothered by the greater noise of the chains within. Downing might well think he heard something, but Storton only laughed at his smothered exclamation.

“ Hear something indeed ! Why, I should say there are a thousand or two of rats and mice scuttling about in and out of that hay, and you say you hear something ! But come, I'm a gentleman at large now. Hand us in your bottle, and don't be a month about it ; time's precious.”

"All right. There, don't break it ; it's some'at slippy. But it's fine, you talking about time's precious, when you ha' kep' me a-standin' about for more'n twenty minutes. Mind yer fill it chock up full. Maybe they won't be putting yer in here for another while to get any more."

Ned paused in his climbing on to the hay at those last words, and breathed more freely. They certainly implied that Downing was ignorant of his companion's awful resolve ; and yet there was some puzzle in the matter, for it was from her drunken husband that Mrs. Downing had received the mysterious hints she had given to Edward Bertram of some impending overwhelming catastrophe to be brought about by him and the forger. However, the next words spoken by the two men cleared up the mystery, and Ned finished his climbing and lay down to listen.

"You've taken care to bring a big enough bottle this time, I feel," laughed Storton. "You evidently don't put much faith in my threats last week, that next time they clapped me in here with those detestable irons on, I'd send them, and you and me, and the whole ship into the middle of next week, or the next world more likely."

"O' coarse not," growled the other with a half shudder. "I don't doubt yer good intentions, if it was only them and the ship, and p'raps me, as would have to go, but yer ain't sech a fool as to do it when yer know as ye'd have to join company yerself."

"Ah, just so," came the quiet answer. "It would require a good deal of courage to put an end to oneself in such a way ; would it not?"

"I believe ye," exclaimed the other in a suppressed tone of horror. "But, sakes alive, man, if I didn't give my old woman a fust-rate, glorious, up-an'-down good fright yesterday, when her went on a-jawin' at me. P'raps I stopped her long clapping tongue pretty sharp, that's all."

"Pretty sharp ! what with ?" muttered Storton, with a sudden, ominous hiss in his voice. "What did you give the woman a fright about?"

"Why, about what you could do, to be sure. Only I put it as if you were not only able, but certain sure to be up to it one o' these days."

"You did, did you? you blabbing fool, you," hissed Storton, as in a paroxysm of fury he dashed the bottle, just handed in to him, at the other man's face. Darkness and passion made him miss his aim, and the bottle hit the wall, and fell smashed into a thousand pieces on the floor inside.

There was a startled exclamation from Downing, and then for a long two minutes all was profound silence. Both the men were listening for those who might be coming to learn the meaning of the unexpected sounds down there. Downing was holding himself in readiness to slip away, and Storton was cursing himself for his want of self-command. But no one came. It was the sailors' dinner hour, and the emigrants had adopted the same time for their meal, so that all were otherwise employed than in listening for far-off noises. At length the cowardly Downing ventured on a whisper—

"Ye clumsy loon, you ; ha' ye been an' gone an' broke my bottle?"

"Just so," replied the prisoner, "and serves you right too, you blabbing idiot. But I wouldn't have broken it if I could have filled it with poison for you, instead of spirits of wine. How dared you go, you miserable rascal, and repeat what I said to you?"

"'Ow should I know yer mind," was the sulky answer. "An' now what be I to do for a bottle ? Ten to one I'll be tracked if I go back for another."

"There, make your mind easy," muttered Storton, who had been rapidly turning matters over in his mind, and had finally

decided to keep on good terms with his comrade, and get rid of him as speedily as possible.

“ I’ll fill my tin for you, and let you have that, and you must console yourself for its small size with the hope that I may soon be in durance vile again. Meantime, hark here a minute; on your honour—or—well—on what you like—swear that you’ll go right off, and tell your wife that was all humbug you were putting off upon her about my intentions. And when you’ve quieted her mind, start off *instanter* and find that young sneak, that Bertram boy, and dog him up and down, here, there, and everywhere, till you are lucky enough to get him quietly and conveniently to yourself, and then chuck him overboard, or, if you cannot manage anything better, tack him on to a dozen or two of squalling brats, and see he doesn’t get free of them in a hurry; for I dare swear that every word you told your wife she’s repeated like a fool to that young blackguard, and that accounts for the visitation I received a while ago. There! I’ve dropped my matches now amongst all this smash of glass splinters. Just hand us in yours.”

“ All right; but have a care. Remember those barrels of gunpowder are right close up agin your wall, and the hay’s touchin’ on to them, an’ if you let so much as a spark kick off into the spirits, we’re all gone critters, as sure’s you’re there, without any more chance o’ you a-makin’ jokes about the matter.”

“ Well,” said Storton coolly, as he took the matches, “ as I was the one to tell you all that, I suppose I may be expected to know it myself.”

As he spoke, he put his hand into the lining of his coat, which was torn and ragged inside, as though from age and long wear rather than from ingenious forethought, and, diving to the bottom of it, he drew up a long, flat coil of taper.

Untwisting one end of the taper, he struck a match and lighted it. Then from the lining of the other flap he produced

a small flat tin vessel, capable of holding perhaps about half-a-pint of liquid.

Having now carefully extinguished the smouldering match, and put the taper in a safe position, so that no accident might happen before he had drunk his own senses into a state of stupefaction, he moved away from Downing, as quickly as his shackled feet would permit, to the wall opposite the door, over which he began a diligent search with both eyes and hands, little dreaming of the two unblinking great brown eyes that were so keenly watching him from a crack in the upper part of the other wall, at right angles to him.

Storton at length found the small hole of which he was in search—a hole made by forcing out a knot in one of the planks. He put his finger upon it while he stooped for a thin, bent tin pipe lying concealed under some old sailcloth ; then that was inserted into the hole, pushed on for three or four inches, until from the sound it evidently came in contact with some wooden object outside, when it was moved about a little until it entered a second hole in the spirits-of-wine cask, made originally with a red-hot skewer, and at the expense of a vast consumption of matches.

It had been a critical piece of work, and one that required a steady hand and a good deal of nerve, to bore into that cask through the hole in the prison cell ; to bore just a little depth with the red-hot tool, knowing that if it went too far in that state a conflagration would ensue, and the secret worker would be burnt to death before it would be possible to rescue him. But Storton had a steady hand and a cool head when not on the verge of *delirium tremens*. He had a good many qualities that might have raised him to an honourable position in the world, had he not chosen to dedicate his powers to the mean grovelling ways of sin by which he earned the contemptible name of forger, the companionship of the lowest and most degraded of his fellow-creatures,

and handcuffs. His cleverness, coolness, and sin had not earned much that was worth envying. The noble-hearted young schoolboy, lying with patient, unconscious heroism on the hay trusses, was far more to be envied, as he held his life in his hand for others, and watched the forger as he took a long sip of the fiery liquid, and then, by the help of a small bladder on the end of his syphon, filled the tin flask.

"Coom now, bring un here a minute," muttered Downing, with craving eagerness. "Let us have a pull at it, and then fill it up again."

His petition was granted, with the whispered caution—

"Be chary now how you drink. Remember what you are about, or this stuff will nigh choke you, and then you'll bring the whole ship's company about our ears."

Five minutes later Downing had crept off with his hidden treasure. He gave a glance round once at the hay, on which a faint glimmering of light fell, through the chinks of the wall, from the taper; but Ned had dragged himself quite to the farther side, and although, with slightly raised head, he could see the retreating figure, he was himself quite out of sight. After giving that glance round, Downing came back to the door to mutter a second warning.

"That hay do be awful close upon ye, to be sure. Have a look-out to carefulness with yer matches and lights. I'd like to have the heads of the fools atween my boot an' the floor who put hay an' gunpowder cheek-by jowl."

"And I," murmured Storton, when his comrade had stolen away again out of hearing—"and I could hug them for their glorious stupidity before I blow them up by means of it. To think that I could have been such a fool as to give even a half-confidence to that miserable, mean-spirited scoundrel! But he's done small harm as yet, apparently, and I'll take good care that his wife's warnings shall not have much more time in which to take effect—at least—at least—"

And for the first time the listener heard a sigh, almost a groan—it might be of compunction, or sudden, surging despair—burst from the forger's lips. He had not always been vile—not always with a stifled conscience—not always with a mind and body and soul steeped in a maddening, deathly drunkenness. With the poison snatched from him, he might even then, at the eleventh hour, have been reclaimed. But he and his cherished deadly foe were together, and the eleventh hour was past, the twelfth was at hand.





C H A P T E R V I.

THE EVE OF DISCOVERY.

IT is difficult to imagine that the world ever contained a more tragic spot than that small dark corner of the ship, the *Good Bess*, which harboured the forger Storton and his watcher, Edward Bertram, that 3rd of May, 1837. It was a beautiful afternoon, the wind was favourable, and the delicious and invigorating breeze blowing on deck had put everyone into good health and spirits—everyone, that is to say, but Downing, who was drinking himself into a state of gloomy drunkenness down below, and his unhappy wife, who had brought about their emigration in the hope of thus reclaiming him from his vicious life, and now found herself so bitterly disappointed. She now sat alternately watching her husband and working at some garment for the child whom Edward Bertram had saved from a watery grave a few days after they left England.

“Susie had better ha’ been drownded than saved to have to live with such a father,” she exclaimed at last, with mingled fear and disgust.

“Pity, as then’s your thoughts,” growled the surly ruffian, “that Storton tells me as all them threats o’ his’n that I telled ye of were only his jokin’. If they’d ha’ been real, now, you

and the child could ha' left me easy, ye see, for 'taint likely as the powder'd ha' taken the perlite thought to send us three's set o' pieces up together."

The half-topsy rascal had barely finished his brutal speech when two firm, heavy hands came suddenly down behind him on his shoulders with a firm, tight grip.

He started violently, and uttered an exclamation that was almost a scream, as he made a frantic effort to wriggle himself free.

But it was a useless attempt. At his best, he would have been no match for the broad-chested, muscular owner of those hands, and in his present fuddled, scared condition he could not have coped successfully with a man far weaker. He fell back upon the coward's alternative—a whining petition for release, beginning with an attempt at braggadocio, and falling off into the most contemptible pitifulness.

"Coom now, ye jackanapes, let un be—let a be, I ses. Leave yer hold, or ye'll ha' to square up accounts wi' me when yer do, I tell ye. Now, coom—them fingers o' yourn are like a vice ; loose a fellow, can't ye ? What's the good o' tryin' to scare a body this gate ?"

"Good ! you wretched rascal ; na good," said the deep, stern tones of the Scotch mate, Macgregor. "There's nought but vileness to be caught by touching you. Good indeed ! How dare you desecrate the word ? There's nought of good to be got by terrifying your mean soul, I know well ; but I may succeed in frightening a confession of evil from your lips."

Then the mate took his hands from Downing's shoulders, and came round and stood facing him, the drunkard seizing the opportunity to put the tin flask once more to his lips, determined, whatever might be about to happen, to make sure of as much of its contents as possible.

"What have you got in that tin ?" asked Macgregor. "But never mind answering," he added immediately ; "I want no

lies. Anderson, come forward and take it from him, and then we can find out for ourselves."

"So ye're down here too, are ye?" muttered the man, as, with a sullen scowl, he permitted the sailor to take away the flask. "An' I hope it may choke ye," he muttered again, when Bill further proceeded to obey his officer's second order to taste it.

And his spiteful wish was gratified, for Bill spluttered and choked to a tremendous degree when his incautious gulp of the strong, fierce spirit got into his throat.

The Scotchman looked doubly grave and thoughtful.

"Where did you get that flask and its contents from? You'd better speak out, or I'll find means to make you."

"I didn't get it nowheres; Storton guv it me."

"Umph! And where did Storton get it from?"

"Dunno."

"Then it will be as well for you to find out within the next ten seconds, or the cat-o'-nine-tails shall have the teaching of you."

The coward turned livid with fear as he gasped—

"No, no, not that. The lock-up, irons, anything—not the cat."

"Nothing, if you tell the truth," was the quiet, stern answer; "if not—the cat, and nothing else. Now, time's up. Anderson, call another to help you."

"No, no, no!" shrieked the miserable creature, as though he already felt the thongs cutting into his flesh. "Stop, Anderson, stop; I'll tell all, I will, if you'll only give me time. I dunno where Storton got the tin from, an' that's white truth, but the spirit he got from that there cask at t' back o' the prison-hut."

The mate and the sailor exchanged startled glances of intelligence, and the examination proceeded by the asking of another question, namely, what Downing's words meant that he had addressed to his wife just before he had been nearly terrified out of the small portion of wits he possessed, by feeling

his shoulders so suddenly grasped. Once again the cat-o'-nine-tails had to be threatened ; once again the threat was sufficient to obtain the desired result of full confession, which proved that, whether Storton had been speaking in joke or earnest, the lad Bertram had at any rate had ample reason for his attempts to persuade the officers of the ship to set some watch over their crafty prisoner.

"No wonder he was wounded at our indifference, and alarmed too, if he had by any means heard aught of this hideous tale," said the mate, looking cautiously towards Mrs. Downing, who sat, pale and shrinking, trying to appear wholly absorbed in her needlework. "But, by the bye, Anderson, where ever is the boy? He was not in his berth, you said, when you looked in just now. But are you really sure? for it's odd we can find him nowhere."

"So it be, sir, so it be. But none the more for that, he weren't in's berth, that's sure, an' he bean't here, and he weren't on deck, an' I han't seen him for mor'n three hours, not since cap'n sent un to get a snooze. I turned in myself, soon arter, you know, sir, and so that's how 'twere I didn't look un up afore. But if you've no objections I'll go on wi' the search right through now for the young gentleman, for, when there's vicious folks about, honest ones happen, now an again, to get spited, an' there's never no knowin' how."

"Just so, Anderson. Besides, we've some amends to make to the boy for the ridicule we cast upon his warnings. I'll join with you in your continued search decidedly ; and you, Jack and Tomlins," to two other sailors passing through at the moment, "you had better come with us, for after we've found Mr. Bertram, we shall have a word to say to the emigrant, Storton."

Long Jack quaked and turned pale. "P-p-please, sir, would you mast-head me instead, or g-give me the cat? He've put the evil eye up-up-on me. I'd r-ra-rather have the cat."

"Nonsense, Jack, you booby, I'm ashamed of you," said the mate with a grim smile. "You'd be a good sailor if it wasn't for your abominable superstition. Four of us against one, and you hang back! Anderson, bring him along with us, and laugh him out of his nonsense. You, Mrs. Downing, go up on deck with your child, and remain there, with companions, until you see me again, or hear from me."

And now we must go back a short time to learn what brought the mate and Anderson upon Downing at the moment when he was making that sneering speech to his wife which proved so very inopportune for him. The fact was, that Bertram's great earnestness had had a deeper effect upon the thoughtful-minded Scotchman than even he himself was at first aware. Captain Pender's utter scepticism helped to allay his growing suspicions, but when he was away from the captain's influence, the belief again grew up in his mind that there might be something, meriting the very gravest investigation, in Bertram's unproved testimony.

The hours had worn away, however, in thought without action, so far as these matters were concerned, and, excepting that he missed the pleasant sight of the lad's cheerful, frank face a good deal, the mate was beginning to let the morning's episode sink into the bygones. A very slight circumstance brought it back vividly to his thoughts. He was standing near a little group of emigrants, who were amusing themselves with talking over their neighbours, for the time being, and discussing their merits and demerits with as much gusto as though they were on shore.

"And there's that poor, down-trodden Mrs. Downing," ejaculated one woman. "Bless you, she'll have no more comfort of her life out yonder than she had in England, with that drunken wretch of a husband o' hers."

"And you may well say drunk," chimed in another. "Why, he ain't never, not to say downright, sober. An' where he gets the drink from passes me, it do. He didn't bring all as he's drunk since he's been aboard ship from England with him, and that's sure enough."

"Gracious sakes, no," said another, while a man stooped over the speakers and muttered mysteriously—

"If ye wants to know where Dick Downing gets his liquor from, I can tell ye fast enuff. He gits it from the forger fellow, who thinks hisself too fine gentlefolks to look at the most on us, only a poor, weak tool like drunken Dick. But if ye goes on to arsk me where the forger gets it from, I'm mum—leastways, I really don't know. Not but what I've tried to find out. I don't mind confessing but he's clever, an' that cunnin' an' artful I could a'most feel like being as skeered at him myself as that sailor chap they call Long Jack is."

Having heard thus much, Mr. Macgregor went off in search of the captain, and when he had found him he began quickly—

"Do you know, I really begin to think that there might be something in the lad Bertram's information a while since. I have once heard of a man being able to slip his handcuffs, and it's not likely that there is only one in the world who can do it."

"But, my good fellow," said Captain Pender, testily, "I gave you free leave to go and see if Storton had, and you went, and found he hadn't. If you aren't satisfied, for goodness' sake go again—a hundred times, if you like—but really I am sick of the subject."

Then Macgregor turned on his heel, and went in search of Bill Anderson. He had not far to seek, for the sailor was coming in quest of him, and asked as he came up—

"Please, sir, I suppose cap'n didna mean as Mr. Bertram

were bound to stay in his cabin till he sent for un, he didna, did he?" anxiously.

" Dear me ; no, Anderson, assuredly not. I was just wanting to send you to him to say I should like to speak to him for a minute."

The good-natured sailor looked immensely relieved.

" Well, I'm main glad, for the young gentleman is na in's cabin whatever, and I feared, mebbe, as he did ought to be after what cap'n said, and he'd likely catch it for bein' about."

" Certainly not," said the mate ; " it was a permission, not a command, the captain gave him. And do you know, Anderson, I begin to have my suspicions that he was more worried than ill, and I am now bent on questioning him as to whether he had any reason, in the first instance, for being in the neighbourhood of Storton when he discovered, or imagined that he had discovered, he was out of irons. You may as well come with me to help look him up."

This joint search for Bertram led the mate and the sailor, in course of time, to the emigrants' quarters, and thus, as has been seen, they came upon the man Downing in the nick of time to make unexpected and startling discoveries. Still, Edward Bertram was not yet found, and his friend, Bill Anderson, was, naturally enough, beginning to feel some anxiety about him. He regarded his officer with considerable approval when Mr. Macgregor joined two others to the search party, and considered their important appearance as they moved on only what was due to his missing favourite. Almost unconsciously the mate at once bent his steps towards the ladder leading still lower down into the vessel's heart, and on towards the prison-cell.

Those seafaring men must manage to roll along a little faster, or they will be too late. It is fortunate that the mate, and the

sailor Tomlins, have not Anderson's prejudices against the three-year-old invention of matches, or there would be small hope for the noble young life that they may yet not be in time to save.

Insensibly as the four men, the mate at the head, got into line for the dark end of the ship that hid the diminutive ship jail, silence fell upon them all. Jack had made one or two trembling efforts to escape, but Bill had got a firm grip upon his waist-band, and showed no intention of weakly relenting in pity to his comrade's terrors. The two moved on silently, the one stern and anxious, the other pressing close up to him, ashy pale and shivering. Tomlins was silent with curiosity, and a certain amount of awe, and the grave Scotchman was engaged in silent prayer.

Suddenly the progress of the party was arrested. Out from the darkness, and swelling onwards, wave upon wave, through the vessel to its furthest corners, came a wild, long, ringing, reverberating shriek—

“Father! Help me!” Then the sound of a sudden rush and a fierce oath.

For one moment the startled feet of Macgregor and his men were arrested. Then they gathered themselves up, and dashed forward into the darkness.





CHAPTER VII.

HATRED, MALICE, AND ALL UNCHARITABLENESS.

A HURRIED tap at the study door of Robinson, head monitor of the great public school of Errington. He was standing with a volume of Homer's *Iliad* in his hand, and, before he could recall his thoughts sufficiently from his book to answer, the handle turned, and the second monitor, Fred Nicholson, entered the room.

"Have you come to breakfast?" asked Robinson, in a somewhat sullen tone, and scarcely deigning to raise his eyes.

"Thank you for nothing," replied Nicholson; "when I take to inviting myself to other fellows' tables I'll look out for a more gracious host. I have rushed off to give you a word of warning."

"Warning?" exclaimed Robinson, with sudden interest. "What about? Surely there cannot be an examination of any kind coming on in the middle of term."

Nicholson looked at his companion for a few moments, and then for answer to the eager question said quietly—

"I am fond of learning myself. I think Fust and Caxton, and the rest of those old printers, the most glorious fellows that ever lived, and I go a little way towards worshipping such men as Bacon and Sir Isaac Newton, but—"

"Well? go on. Out with the 'but.' By all means let us

have the sermon to your text," said Robinson, with a sneer.
"What's the 'but'?"

"Only this, that sooner than let myself sink, as you are doing, into a mere reading machine, dead to all human sympathies, I'd burn my books, cut this place, and enlist in the ranks."

"You're an idiot."

"Perhaps so; and you're a bigger," was the angry retort. "But there, I'm a downright fool to waste my breath on you. If none of the great authors you are so fond of can teach you common sense, it is not likely that I can. Ha!" as a second rap came to the door, "that's your summons to Dr. Brown, no doubt. I wish you well over it; but I'm glad I don't stand in your shoes just now, and I must be off, for I expect my eggs are getting cold. That little rascal, Frere, does not understand the art of keeping things hot as Bertram did, before he got out of fagdom."

"Hang Bertram!" exclaimed Robinson, with a fierce light in his eyes, that looked as if he meant his wish. "He's a chattering magpie, like you. I'll have the lock of my door mended before I'm a day older."

"No need, so far as I am concerned," said Nicholson, haughtily, as he threw back his handsome head, and walked off to his own quarters.

He was the only boy in the school who had kept on good terms with the head monitor. Robinson's great abilities and indomitable industry had excited the admiration of his generous-hearted rival, who had hitherto warded off from him many a disagreeable result of his sullen temper.

All this was ended now. The blind, miserable fellow had wilfully converted a staunch and able ally into an enemy, and he was literally friendless when he turned with a scowl upon the man-servant who stood in his doorway, and asked, impudently—

“What’s your message?”

“You are to go to Dr. Brown, sir, immediately, in the great class-room. I’m afraid you’ll find there’s a pretty coil up, sir,” added the man, with malicious pleasure.

Not a servant about the place liked the boy. “And no wonder,” the old gatekeeper’s wife used to say, “seein’ as how he’d been in the bad luck to be born without a civil tongue in his head.”

The doctor’s splendid colley showed his dislike to the harsh-natured student in a very marked manner whenever opportunity offered, and you may believe the anecdote or not, as you like, but it is true all the same. Whenever the noble animal found himself in the neighbourhood of Robinson, he would immediately walk in a wide circle round the youth, stop when the circle was completed, face him, sit up on his haunches, and give a low, solemn growl; then rise, turn his back upon him, and walk off in a slow and stately manner, that seemed to say as plainly as words could have done—

“I have entered my protest against you, and so far my duty is accomplished for the present.”

This manœuvre was always witnessed with the greatest interest by everybody about the place, and it was a common amusement with the boys to bring it about, a tolerably easy matter in spite of the contrary efforts of the victim. Once manage to get their companion and the dog together in the same class-room, the same school-yard, or the same field, and the affair was accomplished, for Lynx took the further proceedings into its own paws—Robinson was powerless. He had tried several times to escape, but at the first sign of such an attempt the dog would make a swift dart forward, with an ominous snarl that chilled everyone who heard it with dread, and much more the quaking boy himself, who had a natural fear of the whole canine race.

There were only two people in the whole establishment who

had power to call Lynx away in the midst of his strange performance. One of these was Dr. Brown himself, who, of course, always did so when he came upon it, although it may be privately confessed that he had now and then witnessed, and allowed friends to witness, what he termed an extraordinary sight, from behind the shelter of his library curtains. The other individual to whose authority Lynx condescended to submit was young Edward Bertram, and it was partly because he would not always exert his influence on the monitor's behalf that the young tyrant seized so eagerly upon every pretext to punish him. One of the "Lynx exhibitions" had immediately preceded the savage flogging that prompted Ned to run away. Robinson would gladly have spent a year's pocket-money on poison for the dog had he dared, but, lacking the courage for that cowardly revenge, he spent his spite on the boy.

But to follow Jeffery Robinson across the courtyard, and into the great class-room, which he had not entered for nearly two years now, excepting on examination and prize-giving days.

When the monitor went into the long, lofty room, he found the whole school assembled, from Dr. Brown down to the youngest boy — little rosy-cheeked Henty, who smarted under the ignominious nickname of "Baby." At his entrance a murmur began, low at first, swelling up into a general exclamation, and suddenly sinking into dead silence.

Robinson had walked half-way up the room towards the place usually appointed to the head-monitor before he perceived that it was already occupied. One of the masters had taken the seat by Dr. Brown's desire. He hesitated then, and finally stood still, a deep flush of mingled rage and nervousness on his dark face. He looked furtively from side to side, but the benches were all filled. There was no mute invitation in any eyes, no mute invitation conveyed by the movement of even one

boy to offer him refuge from his conspicuous and uncomfortable position. For some moments he suffered greater torture than any his cane inflicted upon Bertram.

Dr. Brown rose, clasped those long firm hands of his upon the desk in front of him, and bent forward. At last he spoke, slowly and deliberately.

“Robinson Major, a circumstance has occurred since eleven o’clock last night which has caused me indescribable annoyance and pain. Some portion of the blame, no doubt, belongs to me and the other masters, for we have had one amongst us who we knew had no home affection to turn to in the troubles and vexations of his boyhood, and we have not remembered to afford him the special friendship that he, and every lonely orphan, would have a right to claim from us. But upon you falls the fullest burden of the charge of injustice and cruelty. Do you know what has happened?”

“No,” muttered Robinson, with lips that would tremble, in spite of his efforts, as he shot a swift glance along the benches of Bertram’s class-mates, and saw that the boy was absent. Could it be possible that he had seriously injured him yesterday in the indulgence of his ungovernable fury?

“Since we separated last night Edward Bertram has disappeared. I received the painful news more than an hour ago, and I have lost no time in making investigations into the business. I have traced the matter so far home that everything points to you—to your incessant and deliberate persecution of one who was friendless—as the cause of his escape from a place that you have made an abode of constant misery to him.”

The doctor paused, and the monitor raised his head and asked, “Can I go now, sir?”

“Yes, you can go. And remember for the future you are no more a monitor. You have abused the power entrusted to

you, and I revoke the trust you have shown yourself incapable of deserving."

"The doctor's awfully wretched about Bert's running away," whispered the boys to each other, as they scurried off in a confused heap, like a flock of sheep when a dog comes near, and the whole flock tries to perform the impossible feat of being all middle and no outside.

"How horrid our house will be without him," said another; "he was the jolliest fellow here."

Happily for the deposed monitor, Jeffery Robinson, his morning letters brought him news of an open scholarship to be tried for, which afforded him means of instant escape from the scene of his degradation. Dr. Brown was almost as glad to be rid of him as he was to go.

Two hours later, Robinson walked for the last time through the gateway of Errington. He had said no good-bye, and received none at the school. The departing schoolboy, as he may be termed for the last time, had taken measures expressly to avoid the "God speed you" of every one. He had left his luggage to be sent after him, and having watched his opportunity anxiously, he crept noiselessly, and with feverish haste, along the corridors, down the stairs, across the courtyard and playground, and escaped, like a thief, from the scene of so many triumphs and final humiliation.

But he did not get off with quite the secrecy upon which he had begun to congratulate himself. Two very sharp eyes had observed the quick, stealthy glances that the student had cast at all the surrounding windows as he issued from the doorway of his house; and, unseen themselves, those two particularly sharp eyes had watched the ex-monitor's swift course towards the outer gates. And beneath the sharp eyes was a particularly sagacious nose, that tossed itself up in the air with an enquiring sniff. Then followed a short space of earnest thought and deliberation, while the nose was laid quietly along on the

ground, and kept warm between two sets of toes. And just when any beholder would have supposed that that nose was the nose of a sleeper, it was suddenly flung up again with a decisive snort. Its owner's self-commune was ended, and, like a black-feathered arrow, it flew after the unfortunate Robinson, and suddenly arrested his further progress by a long, low growl. There, sitting upon his haunches, with an air of the most determined resolution, was that superlatively aggravating and intelligent Lynx, right in the pedestrian's pathway.

Robinson stooped and picked up a stone, with a face white with fury. Lynx looked at the stone, and got up and came a little nearer, and gave a second growl, and drew back his lips.

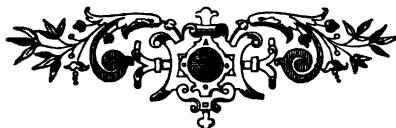
Robinson looked at the two rows of gleaming teeth, and his hand trembled and dropped the stone, and he stood still. Then Lynx began his exhibition. He walked once round as usual. Then he hesitated; and whether he felt that the occasion was an especial one, or that the delighted chuckles of the gate-keeper and his wife made him unusually proud of his performance, Robinson had to endure the torture of a second round, while the old couple stood at their open window, and made their remarks close behind his back.

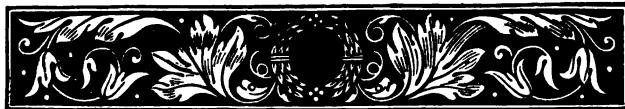
“Deary, deary me,” exclaimed old Mother Sharplin, “if the beautiful critter isn’t a’most as knowin’ as a Christian!”

“Bless *you*!” chuckled her husband, with a great emphasis on the “you,” that hanimal could pick you out them as ain’t born to be drownded anywhere. Dear, dear, if it ain’t as good as playactin’ to watch him, an’ he so king—stately-like! There now, see, he’ll set up an’ bark.”

And so Lynx did. One growl, and one bark, and then he turned short off, re-entered the school premises, and made his way up to his master, while Robinson pursued his way to the inn whence the stage-coach started for his home. He would have given up even his hopes of the scholarship to be able to kill that dog. His late schoolfellow Edward Bertram, and his

schoolmaster's dog Lynx, were distinguished with his especial hatred. But the dog was quietly licking his own paws and the blacking off his master's boots, alternately, while he lay comfortably at his master's feet, and young Bertram was pursuing his road to Portsmouth, intent upon the completion of his purpose, and only remembering his old tormentor when fatigue compelled him now and again to throw himself down under a hedge to rest, and the cuts and weals on his wounded back came into unpleasant contact with the ground. But as far as he is concerned, this history has carried him some weeks farther on in his life, and we must now proceed to relate what led to the wild shriek by which the mate of the *Good Bess* and his companions were electrified, as they were proceeding in search of the runaway schoolboy.





CHAPTER VIII.

FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH.

EARLY three hours before that startling cry already mentioned was uttered, Edward Bertram, the schoolboy, or, as Captain Pender usually called him, the "Stowaway," had stretched himself out upon the top of the piled-up hay to keep strict watch and ward over the pitiless Storton.

It is told of a noble Scotch boy, during the war of the last century between the English and Charles Edward, that, being forbidden leave, on account of his youth, to march with his father's clan to battle, he was sent out to superintend the herdsmen guarding the cattle. His neighbourhood, as is the case with most neighbourhoods during war time, was infested with a set of rascals who belonged to no party but their own, and who cared nothing which side lost so that they gained. It was the custom with this fighting, thieving set of vagabonds to scare away or kill the cattle-keepers, and then drive the cattle. After the first commencement of their operations they very seldom had to do any killing, for the poor, base-born herdsmen never lost a moment's time in scampering as far away as possible from the dangerous neighbourhood of their charges, the moment the heads of the freebooters appeared above the crests of the hills. In due course of time the robbers turned their attention to the cattle belonging to this Scotch boy's clan. According to

custom, the instant they appeared in sight the herdsmen rushed frantically away, in spite of the remonstrances of their chief-tain's young son. The boy remained at his post, offering what resistance he could, valiantly. But, of course, he was soon overcome, and then the freebooters questioned him how he dared defy them, and why he had not run off with his retainers?

"How could I act otherwise than I have done?" was the calm and simple answer. "I was sent out to guard the cattle. I have fulfilled my duty so far as my power went." Then he waited quietly for the expected death at his lawless captors' hands.

It is well for human nature that we are able to add that the nobility of the young prisoner struck some answering chord in the souls of the wild freebooters, and they despatched him safely home with the greater part of the property that he had stood by so faithfully.

We simply give this true page of history to show you, boys, that the character and acts of Edward Bertram are not over-drawn, they can be matched in numberless instances. His own answer was much the same as the Scotch boy's, when, years after, he was complimented on his bravery.

"How could I act otherwise than I did? Circumstances had betrayed to me the awful danger of the ship and all on it, and of course I had to do all that lay in my power to avert it. And the more so that my own faulty way of getting on board had weakened the warning influence I might have had with the captain."

However, to come back to that May morning, when Ned lay on the trusses of hay, and saw the glimmering of Storton's taper shining through the chinks of the wall upon the barrels of gunpowder and the broached spirits-of-wine cask. He looked through the chinks of the wall at the flickering taper and the box of matches, and he knew perfectly well, as each

minute passed, that the next might be his last. But he felt no fear now. His heart even swelled with some natural pride as he held the clever, cunning forger under his steady gaze, and felt how much depended upon his presence of mind and readiness. After a short time Storton extinguished the taper, as a precaution against detection or any further disturbance in the prosecution of his nefarious schemes; and for a terrible two hours Ned kept guard in darkness. Even the deep silence was only broken at long intervals by a quiet rattle of the chains, as Storton turned from one side to the other for ease on the hard floor, or rose, once or twice, to refill the very small measure he had retained for himself to drink from, when he gave up the larger flask to Downing.

“Poor fool,” he chuckled once, soliloquising aloud about that recent gift. “He little knows how short a time he’s got in which to empty that.”

Ned felt not the smallest inclination now to sleep, notwithstanding the silence and darkness. Every faculty was strung to the utmost, and he was as wide awake and as keen as the rats, who were regarding him as a most unwarrantable interloper. Once or twice the little animals nearly ruined everything by dashing up through the hay, bringing a cloud of dust in their train, which half-choked their human companion, and almost forced him to sneeze. As he lay there, compelled to idleness as to his body, his mind worked away harder than it had ever done at school, although he had been no idler or dunce there, in spite of Jeffery Robinson’s contemptuous epithets. He turned over the circumstances of the present case in every possible manner, and regarded it from every aspect that you can have done; and thought quite as clearly and cleverly as you may be doing, of what was really the best and wisest way for him to act now, and if he had really chosen it. About the middle of his solemn watch he wavered in his opinion. He wavered to such a degree that he actually stole

down from his perch, and began to creep softly away towards the more inhabited quarters of the ship. It did seem such an awful, tremendous responsibility he was taking upon himself, and for some minutes it seemed too great for him to bear, it appeared to overwhelm him. He felt that he must burst away from it, rush on deck, and compel the captain and others to listen to him, to believe him, and to act with him.

When he reached that point in his resolve he climbed down from the hay-stack, and left the prison as far behind him as that border-land of light and darkness lay, on which he had so often paused already. There he paused once more, and as he grew calmer he sighed, and then he crept back again, and clambered, inch by inch, with stealthy care and caution, on to his losty couch once more, and lay in the darkness waiting for what time should bring to his hands to do. Reason told him but too surely that the very grimness of the narrative he could give would prevent its credence, there being not the smallest previous preparation for its belief. And the more passionately he might try to proclaim it, the more rooted would become the belief in his own delirium, and the less chance there would be of even his being left free to do his utmost to avert the threatened doom. He wavered no more. From this moment he put his whole trust in himself under God, and the next hour was spent in prayer and watching—ceaseless watching, that let scarcely a sound of the forger's breath escape him. Seven years later, Edward Bertram was alone with a furious madman in the midst of a tract of blazing Australian bush, and while he kept the madman at bay, and watched the windward run of the flames, the strange memory leaped up in his mind of his boyhood's watch, seven years before, over the poor sinful wretch in the dark depths of the *Good Bess*. Fresh nerve and vigour came to him with the thought, and he felt that the wild, open field of fire, and irresponsible disease, were companions infinitely

preferable, infinitely less terrible, than that dark ship corner blackened with the brooding sin and drunken hate it shrouded. A sort of tender pity for the brave, unflinching boy-watcher came to him, although the boy had been himself. But in the present, the boy Ned felt no compassion at all for that individual. His most vivid sensation, as the slow time—the same time that was flying away so blithely up on deck—dragged its weary course along down there, was a tremendous longing for something to happen. You understand, he did not *wish* that anything dreadful should come to pass, or be attempted at all, but, if it was to be attempted, he most heartily wished that it might be attempted soon. None of us ever *wish* that there should be a great fire, but when there is one we cannot help wishing to see it. Ned's feelings were very similar. He was waiting for something that was almost positively to occur, and the tediously drawn-out expectation was only an additional item in the dismal programme.

At last something occurred. All had been intensely still and silent in the narrow prison for nearly twenty minutes. Ned had begun to torment himself with the apprehension that perhaps the diabolical scheme was already in progress, and that the darkness and silence would render him powerless to interfere. But affairs were not quite so far gone in hopelessness as all that.

The silence was, all on a sudden, broken by a loud snore, and a sound as of something thumping pretty heavily against the wall, followed by an exclamation of pain.

"Why, hang it all," muttered Storton's voice the next moment, "if I haven't been letting myself fall asleep before I've made my preparations. 'Law sakes,' as that fellow Downing would say, I've certainly nigh upon robbed myself of my revenge. If it hadn't been for giving myself this crack on the skull, I don't believe I should have woke up in time to get the thing done this bout."

While he thus muttered he moved about, feeling with his hands on the floor for his matches. "Hang it!" he grumbled once more, flinging away match after match as he broke them in trying to strike them. "Hang it, how my hands shake! If anyone saw them, they'd think it was the effects of conscience, perhaps. Ah! growing compunction, no doubt. Poor fools, what a mistake they would make!" and he uttered a somewhat unsteady laugh.

But if conscience were striving to make itself heard in this terrible hour, the demon of drink did its best to stifle it.

At length he got a match to burn, and lighted his taper once more. Edward Bertram had not now many more minutes of suspense to endure. He crept to the very edge of the haystack, to be ready to descend in a moment; and he took the door-key out of his pocket, and grasped it firmly and very closely in his hand; and all the time he never left off watching through the cracks between the boards of the wall. Storton was now moving on unsteady feet up to the mast, where he let himself slip gently on to the floor, and felt under the sailcloth for his hidden treasures, which were nothing less than two twisted lengths of straw, twisted the first time he had been put in irons, when this terrible plan of revenge had first occurred to the wretched drunkard's mind, and he had begun preparations for its execution by twisting the straw matches. On the next occasion that he had contrived, purposely, to get locked up for some offence, that he might indulge his terrible craving for drink, he had duly prepared the twists for his purpose; and now, as he found them and drew them towards the taper, he looked at them with an evil glee and self-gratulation. Helping himself up by clutching at the dangling handcuffs, Storton now reeled back to the wall, and, having taken a final sip or two of the spirit, to fortify his wavering resolution, he withdrew the tin tube, and with considerable difficulty inserted one end of a straw-twist through the two

holes into the cask. Then he moved on along the wall about three feet, and, feeling about a little while, he found another hole, pushed an end of the second twist through that, and after some trouble, and having once to remove it and put in the other end because he had so bent the first, he got that, in turn, securely into a hole in one of the barrels of gunpowder—a fact he made known by his triumphant exclamation.

Matters were drawing on fast enough at last. The crisis was at hand. Ned's heart began to beat violently, and the blood to course wildly through his veins. He slid to the ground. Had there been time now, he would have flown to seek help stronger than his own; but there was no time—no time to seek human help, only time to seek that which is Almighty. Those matches were fearfully short. Once lighted, they would have burnt their way up to the powder and spirit casks in little more than five minutes; and the forger seemed scarcely even drowsy now, and, though so tipsy, he had a good deal of strength and power yet left in him.

Ned's self-sacrifice threatened, after all, to be a useless one. He dared not lean against the door, and yet his agitation was so great that he could scarcely stand. It is a solemn thing to hold your life in your hand, and to know that ten minutes hence it may be lost, as far as this world is concerned. Storton, having so far made his preparations, and placed his lighted taper close at hand, appeared in no hurry to consummate his black deed. He seated himself again, with his back against the wall, between the two straw-twists, and closed his eyes; but whether the thought of death, so close at hand, shook even his dulled heart, or that the snatch of sleep he had had already had partially weakened the effect of the spirit, the desired drowsiness appeared to elude his wishes now. He drew out his small flask, and found, to his relief, that it was not yet drained. Sucking his lips to get off even the few drops clinging

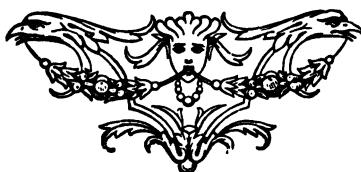
ing to them, he again composed himself, and after a few more minutes of that dread silence, he opened his eyes heavily, lifted the two ends of the straw-twists, and slowly lighted them. Ned stole the key into the lock.

There was a yard of straw-twist, five minutes of time, between life and death for four hundred human beings, and only the courage and constancy of one young lad in the scale for life. Up on deck the emigrants were talking over their plans for the future, some of them discussing their hopes of return to the old home, ten, fifteen, or twenty years hence. Captain Pender was meditating on the probable weather of to-morrow, and the possibility of the ship sighting land—and those two straws were burning on. There were only four minutes now between life and death, for Captain Pender, his ship, and his passengers. And Edward Bertram's hand was beginning to turn the key, and a sharp agony was gnawing at his heart ; for he saw that it was almost an impossibility that he could draw away, and cast out of reach, both those deadly matches lying close, one on either side of the drunken, cruel villain, before he should be seized and strangled by the forger's strong white fingers. The man was lightly dozing no more. Ned expected to be killed in the execution of his self-imposed task ; but, oh ! if only the great reward might be granted him in death of its accomplishment.

With this agonised entreaty struggling up to his lips, and almost forcing audible utterance, the key was turned, the door swung wide, and the young and noble and pure-hearted boy, and the wretched forger who had crushed his father's heart into the dust, were face to face ! Alas ! they were more. They were eyes to eyes. The noise of the falling lock, the inrush of air, roused the man, who had been striving for unconsciousness indeed, but not obtaining it. For some awful moments they gazed at each other. Then, with a low howl, more like a wild beast's utterance than that of a human

being, Storton sprang forward. At the same moment, out upon the air, rang that long, clear, ringing cry—

“Father! Help me!” Edward Bertram flung himself forward on the floor of the cell with outstretched hands grasping at the two matches, and they fell from the holes as he fell to the ground. Then came the deadly clutch upon his throat which he had expected, and he knew no more.





CHAPTER IX.

“I WANT MY HEIR, SIR.”

“I WANT my heir, sir ; I want my heir. I insist on having
my heir. There, sir ! Now what do you say to that,
sir ?”

Nothing was said to that for a minute or two.

The speaker was a most irascible-looking old gentleman, who was stomping up and down Dr. Brown's library at the public school of Errington. It is just possible that there is no such word to be found in *your* dictionaries as “stomping.” However, it is perfectly certain that if there is not, there ought to be, for “stamping” does not in the least describe the special way in which this old gentleman was managing to disturb the usual peace and harmony of the Doctor's studious refuge.

A jerk, and a kick, and a stumble, followed by a stamp, and then another jerk, and kick, and stumble, followed by another stamp, cannot all be a stamp ; can it, now ? Surely there can be but one answer, and that answer, No.

However you put the question, it will come to the same thing ; you will find, even if you ask it as a riddle—“Why is a jerk, and a kick, and a stumble like a stamp ? or like stamping ?” which you will ; the only possible answer that can be given must be, “Because it isn't.” Well then, having proved that all future dictionaries must give the word, “stomp-

ing—a complicated and peculiar mode of progression" (and *not* "vulgar for stamp"), we can proceed—not, I hope, to stomp ourselves, but—to learn the meaning of this intrusion upon Dr. Brown.

It is of course needless to say that, when Edward Bertram disappeared from Errington, the head-master lost no time in sending intelligence of the event to his guardian, and only near relation, General Sir Edward Bertram, K.C.B. And a letter had been received back by return, which meant a lapse of four days between the despatch of the one and the receipt of the other in 1837.

And the letter was not a very satisfactory one when it did arrive. It began with a good round of abuse of the General's grand-nephew, and it ended with a good round of very slightly more carefully worded abuse of the school authorities, who had let him escape from their discipline.

However, there was a sentence in the middle of the letter from which Dr. Brown had drawn some comfort. It was this:—

"No doubt, sir, the disgraceful young scoundrel has run away to sea. *I* once ran away to sea. And I was flogged and sent back. My grand-nephew must be flogged and sent back. And I was flogged when I got back. I desire that my grand-nephew may be flogged when he gets back. . . ."

The four floggings—the two in the past, the other two ordered for the future—had but small impression upon the Doctor's mind, but the suggestion that the missing pupil might have made his way to the sea coast, and got taken on board some ship, gave a new impulse and purpose to the inquiries that were being instituted for him in all directions.

Every list of passengers and crews that could be got hold of was diligently perused, but of course in vain, and the old General, who was suffering from a long and severe attack of gout, fumed and stormed at the non-discovery of the boy,

till he had nearly fumed and stormed himself into the grave.

The news of his nephew's escape from Errington reached him the 27th of March; but it was the 27th of May before he was well enough to post across England, from his estate in Gloucestershire, to make the personal demand for his nephew with which this chapter opens.

He had sent due warning, some days before, of his coming, and the Doctor had been trying to school himself for the interview. But he found it almost more painful and disagreeable than he had expected.

Dr. Brown would have laughed, if he had not been feeling so grieved and angry, at the absurdity of the old gentleman's repeated exclamation, with every variety of tone and gesture—

“I want my heir, sir—I want my heir.”

And now there was the imperative, ridiculously unreasonable addition—

“I insist on having my heir! There, sir! Now what do you say to that, sir?”

Of course Dr. Brown could not possibly have anything to say to that, and so he held his peace, biting his lips. And he did not quite know whether he bit them to keep in laughter or indignation.

At last Sir Edward had thoroughly tired himself out with his violent exercise, and he flung himself heavily back into an arm-chair, and, drawing out a yard or two of silk pocket-handkerchief, he at first mopped at his forehead and head with it, and then dropped his face into it, only just in time to about half smother a gulping sob.

At that most marvellous and utterly unexpected sound, Dr. Brown started, and stared, with an air of the most bewildered amazement, at his visitor. Was he literally choking with passion, or was that sob a token of grief?

There was another gulp. And then the head-master sat up

in his chair, and leant forward, and said, in a low tone of mingled sympathy and surprise—

“Forgive me, my dear General; but surely you are not taking so bitterly to heart the loss of one for whom you cared literally nothing when he was—was—”

Dr. Brown had been about to finish his sentence with the word “alive,” but he suddenly broke off. He could not openly admit, even to himself, the belief that the uncared-for orphan, the desolate young pupil, was really beyond the reach of human love. However, even in its unfinished state, his sentence struck hardly enough upon its hearer. The proud white head bowed lower, as the old man growled, with an unsteady voice and misty grammar—

“I didn’t care literally nothing for him? Nothing of the sort, sir; I tell you, nothing of the sort! But the world’s full of fools—fools! The gun-muzzle of the world is choked up with them, I say. Because I didn’t have a young rascal, a regular nuisance of a boy, cutting his capers about me; because I didn’t cram his mouth with lollipops till he got sick, and give him pop-guns and pocket-knives to maim himself with, the world and his wife cry out—‘Well, you’ve had a small loss! You did not care for the lad!’”

The old General sat upright now, and spread out his long-fingered, bony hands upon his knees, and fixed his keen grey eyes upon his companion.

“The world’s a fool, sir; and his wife’s a bigger! And now, what do you say to that, sir?”

Once again Dr. Brown said nothing to it outwardly. But inwardly he did say that he wished the very gallant general, Sir Edward Bertram, K.C.B., was a small boy with his name on the Errington books. In that case it is possible, although the Doctor’s sway was mild—peculiarly so for forty years ago—it is possible, we repeat, that that small boy might have received a speedy and impressive lesson against asking preposterous

questions, to which, from the very nature of circumstances, it was utterly impossible to give any answer.

However, answer or no answer, it was much the same to Sir Edward Bertram, and after a pause he continued in a firmer and somewhat calmer voice—

“Yes, the world’s a fool—the world’s a fool !”

The repetition of that piece of information appeared so soothing to his own ears and feelings that he repeated it a third time before continuing—

“If I didn’t waste any nonsensical affection upon *the boy*, I always meant to downright love the man he was to grow into one day. Why, sir, I cared literally nothing for him, indeed, do the fools say? Do you know, sir, for this twelve years past, sir, I have been improving my estate for my heir. I have planted trees for my heir; I have drained ever so much marsh land for my heir; I have bought plate for my heir; laid down wines for my heir! Everything I have spent my money and my brains on, sir, has been for this young rascal of an heir of mine. And then I am told I cared literally nothing for him! What more would you have had me do?”

“Give him a little of the love in the present,” said the Doctor, with quiet sadness, “that you have been so lavishly storing up for him in the future. Do you know, Sir Edward, that it is the general opinion of the whole school that your nephew had gradually grown old enough to feel that life, with no ray of loving kindness to shine upon it, was too hard to bear.”

Once more the head that had held itself so bravely at Waterloo sank down. But the old veteran was not going to yield quite without a struggle; he showed fight still a little longer in the surly mutter—

“What did the young blackguard’s father and grandfather go and get killed for, then, and leave him to the care of the old bachelor of the family? How was I to know that the

young rascal wanted me to love him? I loved his grandfather—a bonnier lad than his grandson need ever hope to be, dead or alive—and his grandfather got killed. Ay, man, killed by my side, saving his worthless old elder brother's life, who'd have died, and gladly, to save him. Then I loved the rascal's father; loved him as if he'd been my own son—ay, and more, for he was my dead brother's son, and he got killed. And now, man alive, you'd have had me love this good-for-nothing boy! And he's gone. Thank you; I think I've had enough of loving."

And then the stern voice broke, and the iron frame shook with suppressed emotion.

The lonely, bereaved old man might be almost forgiven for thinking that a life begun without love was less to be pitied than one that was bereft, at its ending, of the rich treasures it had once possessed.

Had the head-master been able to turn the famous war-worn warrior into a small boy now, he would have done it—not that he might chastise him, but that he might dare the more freely to try to comfort him.

At the same time, the position of affairs was rather embarrassing, for it was quite impossible that the head-master of Errington should sit all day in his library with the great-uncle of a runaway pupil. They had been together for more than an hour now, and the old general showed no more signs of intending to take leave than he had done five minutes after his arrival; and there really seemed nothing more to be said or done that could be of any profit.

"How was it," asked Sir Edward at last—"how was it that my nephew was so dependent upon my love? Was the lad such a curmudgeonly young rascal that he could win no liking from his schoolfellows?"

"Nothing of the sort," said Dr. Brown quickly. "Of course, as he was one of the younger boys, I had very little to

do with him myself; but I never met him without looking with pleasure at his frank face and honest brown eyes. And he was a general favourite amongst his companions. It was the long, dreary holidays to which your orders condemned him that made him think over and understand the dreary desolateness of his life. Dozens of his schoolmates would have gladly taken him with them when they went home for their holidays, but your orders were strict that he was to accept no invitations. And I find that he was peculiarly unfortunate in the silent, reserved character of the master in whose house he spent his last Christmas holidays."

That admission was somewhat unwise on Dr. Brown's part. His listener snapped at it as eagerly as a cat might do at an unwary mouse. He sat up again, and his grey eyes glittered as he exclaimed imperiously—

"And pray, sir, whose fault was it that he was condemned to spend his holidays with a brute? Perhaps you'll say that *that* was my fault, sir? I deny it, sir, I deny it. I affirm that it was the fault of somebody else, not a hundred miles from me. So there, sir! Now what do you say to that, sir?"

"That you are a disgracefully impertinent old man, and that I desire you to leave me instantly," Dr. Brown was half, no, a quarter tempted to say; but he did not say it. He was beginning to understand the heart of the way-worn old man better than he did when the General first entered his room. He understood it still better when the old man rocked himself slowly backwards and forwards, and murmured in tender tones of pity—

"Poor boy, poor boy! Four weeks shut up with a brute! My Edward's son shut up with a brute!"

"Not a brute, General—anything but a brute," Dr. Brown ventured at last to remonstrate on behalf of his maligned master. "Mr. Smith is certainly not a brute—rather lax,

perhaps, if anything, in discipline. Only not given to laughter or conversation. No care for boys' amusements."

"Then he is a brute, sir," growled Sir Edward—"a selfish brute. So what do you say to that, sir? Bless my heart alive, are boys to have no pleasure in their young days, but to be snarled and frowned into young prigs? His next holidays my heir shall spend at Bertram Hall."

And with that very positively spoken, but at the same time most doubtful announcement, the Duke of Wellington's well-known friend and comrade rose to take his leave. Dr. Brown rose also, but before he had moved a step from his writing-table there came a sharp knock on the panel of the door.

The knock was followed by the almost immediate entrance of the visitor, before the Doctor had fairly had time to finish his words, "Come in."

He started when he recognised the identity of his new guest, as well he might, and exclaimed in a tone of slightly indignant astonishment—

"Robinson!"

At the utterance of that name the General started also, and strode forward towards the young man who had just entered the room, and with his wrinkled face growing purple with fury, he flung his right hand out towards him as he exclaimed—

"Young man, if you are the villain whose acts helped to drive my heir to desperation, I can tell you that your opportune arrival here has saved me a journey down to your home. I can say what I had to say without waste of time. You have destroyed my hopes, young man; and my object in life, for the future, shall be to destroy yours. I will dog you, watch your course, and when you think to grasp the coveted crown of your struggles, I will contrive, somehow, to be always ready to dash it down. You have robbed me of my heir; I will rob you of the success you crave, the triumphs you expect to obtain."

Then the baronet strode on past Robinson, out of the room and down the stairs, leaving his hearers electrified with the vindictiveness of his speech—a speech made still more bitter by the relentless fierceness of the tone in which it was uttered.

Robinson's pale face turned a shade paler, and, the instinct of party feeling rising up in his master's breast, the Doctor felt drawn to take part with his pupil against his vengeful enemy. While the two struggled to regain composure, the wealthy and influential Sir Edward Bertram was suffered to depart unattended, and make his way across the school-yard and towards the outer gates alone.

"Hullo! who's that?" asked a boy, standing amidst a knot of companions at the edge of the cricket field.

"Oh! a bigwig of some sort," said another, looking admiringly at the fine, upright figure, and stern, commanding face.

"I know who he is," exclaimed a third boy; "at least I know half, for I asked the man-servant who came with him, and he stared at me because I didn't know, as if he thought I'd just come from the Cannibal Islands."

"Well there, cut all that, look sharp. Who did he say he was?"

"Why, he said, 'Bless you, young gentleman! don't you know as my master's Sir Edward, him as was so great at Waterloo before you were born?' But he didn't say what name came after the Edward."

"Never mind," cried the first boy. "You are sure, Ben, that he said 'Sir Edward'?"

Yes, Ben was quite sure of that. And being convinced on that point, the questioner sprang over the railings, and flew after the retreating "bigwig," slipping adroitly in front of him, cricket-cap in hand, just before he reached the gates.

The General stopped short, as, indeed, he was bound to do, if he did not intend to try to walk over the tolerably tall and broad obstruction in his path.

“Do you want anything, boy?”

“Yes, please, Sir Edward,” as glibly as if he had known Sir Edward’s first name, and second name too, any time the past thirteen years, and been tipped by him with praiseworthy regularity. “Yes, please, Sir Edward. You know it’s the custom for all visitors here, who’ve done anything fine, to get us a holiday; so perhaps you’ll do the same, please. The battle of Waterloo was a good many years ago, but that doesn’t matter, sir, a bit—at least it won’t if you tell the head-master that it needn’t.”

A grim smile spread over the soldier’s stern countenance, as he looked down at the merry, mischievous face before him. Then his eyes grew dim as he asked—

“Did you know my heir, my nephew, Ned Bertram, my boy? Did you like him?”

The fun and impudence died out of the blue eyes, and their owner moved aside as he stammered, “Yes, sir, yes—everybody liked—liked Ned but you—and—thank—you, sir—but we don’t want the holiday.”

And then the boy rushed away—not back to the companions who had been admiringly watching his “plucky proceedings,” but first to the solitude of one of the class-rooms, to get rid of the suddenly-recalled sorrow for his lost schoolfellow. And then he flew to his favourite monitor, Fred Nicholson, to tell him of the meeting with poor, jolly old Ned Bertram’s horrid old tyrant of an uncle.

“And I wouldn’t have had a holiday, not of his giving, wretched old Blue Beard!” exclaimed the boy impetuously; “not if the school term was to last all the rest of the year.”

“Perhaps he never understood how dull Bertram must find having no letters or messages, and no home to go to in the holidays,” said Nicholson quietly.

He had watched the scene between the boy and the General from his window, and, although he had heard none of their con-

versation, he had been struck with the way in which the old man's stately head had drooped when the boy hastened away from his side ; and he began to think, now that he heard who he was, that the whole weary air of dejection, betrayed by manner and figure, was that of a man who had lost a possession which he would have been glad to keep.

If such were the case, Nicholson, for his part, felt that he must forgive him, and even pity him, for not having sooner discovered the value of his treasure.

That evening Sir Edward Bertram's be-plushed and be-powdered man-servant came up to the college again, with a message to the head-master.

" If you please, Sir Edward's respects to Dr. Brown, and if Dr. Brown could only suggest anything more to be done towards finding Sir Edward's heir, Sir Edward would be deeply grateful."

" Dr. Brown's respects back, and he would try to think of something."

And then Dr. Brown leant his head in his hands with a weary sigh, for he thought he knew that the luckless young heir was dead. He little dreamt, however, in what a strange and startling way his fears were likely to prove to have been realised.

The next day the owner of Bertram Hall posted back to the estate that he had been making so beautiful for the runaway who had hoped to find the wide world more home-like than his home.

" What shall we be doing about the improvements now, General ? " asked Jarvis, the steward.

" Go on with them. My heir will be sick of the sea in a year's time, and then we'll have him here—and—and—well—if he proves too great a nuisance to me, I shall turn him over to you, Jarvis, and a tutor ; and if you and he and the tutor, with the aid of guns, dogs, books, and horses, cannot manage

to make yourselves happy—well, you'll be a set of sticks, who had better be miserable."

It was all very well for Sir Edward to talk like this, and to decide upon what he would choose to have done twelve months hence. Unfortunately for him, his nephew was not a chicken with a string tied round its leg, whereof one end was in his great-uncle's hand.





CHAPTER X.

HUMBLE PIE EATEN TOO PROUDLY.

WE must return for a few minutes to Dr. Brown's library, from which we hurried, somewhat unceremoniously, after Sir Edward Bertram, leaving the head-master and his former pupil standing opposite each other, and both equally pale, although agitated by the different feelings of sorrow, fear, and anger.

"I cannot forbear saying, Robinson, that I am grieved you should have had those harsh, meaningless threats hurled at you after this fashion."

"And by the uncle, of all people," said the young man, with mingled scorn and passion. "I wonder whether old—whether Sir Edward Bertram knows to whom the boy himself gave the larger share of the blame for his sentimental miseries and puling—"

"Hold!" shouted Dr. Brown, and he brought his hand down with a sudden thud upon the book lying on his table nearest to him. "Be silent, sir. You have presumed too far upon my momentary compassion for you. You deserve none. I doubt if you are even conscious of needing it. A youth so callous-hearted that he can descend to libelling a dead companion is beneath compassion. He deserves little more than the loathing pity we may bestow upon a half-crushed viper."

The fine intellectual face of the head-master glowed with righteous indignation, and even Robinson's dull conscience was stung by his words so far as to lead him to enter a protest against the positive way in which the Doctor had spoken of his former schoolfellow's death."

"You blame me, sir, for my words. I don't know whether you think it fair to pile up what you consider my crime by affirming for a fact what is only a supposition of your own, founded on not one tittle of evidence. If I believed Bertram dead, as you do, I might speak of him differently. At the same time, I have asked for neither pity nor compassion. I have come here to-day to claim bare justice."

"What is it you want of me? In what manner am I to show you justice?"

"The tales of my last morning here and of my sudden departure have spread abroad by some means, and the particulars have got so shamefully exaggerated and distorted that I am likely to suffer great injury. My tutor says that he has heard from Oxford that the gross falsehoods detailed to my disadvantage may even prejudice my admission to my college."

"I am very sorry," said Dr. Brown gravely.

"I trust," replied Robinson hotly, "that you will see fit, sir, to be more than sorry. I have come to demand——"

A strange, firm, set look came over the Doctor's face, and Robinson stopped short with a sort of gasp, and his sudden imperiousness of manner dwindled and dwindled till it faded all away and died.

There was a long pause. The Doctor's over-indulged Persian cat jumped up on the table, and laid itself down comfortably on the top of its master's papers, and the Doctor stroked its ears absently.

Robinson's hatred of young Bertram, or of his memory, grew fiercer than ever, but nothing of that sentiment appeared in his voice when he next spoke. His words and their tone betrayed

nothing but the most intense anxiety when he again ventured to break the silence.

“Sir, do you mean—can you mean to refuse to clear me of these false charges? Your refusal, sir, blights all the prospects of my life.”

“Of what refusal are you speaking?” asked the master calmly, turning from his cat to look quietly at the agitated speaker. “I have given no refusal, for I have been asked nothing. I seldom, if ever, refuse requests—*when*,” he added significantly, “they are couched in such language that I can grant them with due regard to my own dignity.”

Twenty minutes later, Dr. Brown was in possession of all the particulars of the queer, unt rue, and in some cases ridiculous stories about Robinson, that seemed to have been grown and spread by the air; and Robinson had the satisfaction of perusing the letter to the Vice-Principal of —— College, in which the Doctor denied all the false charges.

When the Vice-Principal learnt the nature of the real charge against the new scholar, he dismissed it with an astonished laugh and a—

“Pooh-pooh! The idea of making all this coil about nothing! I’d stake the Bodleian upon it that the youngster merited a dozen worse floggings than he got. And as for running away! Well, if only all the bad boys would run away, there would be more plums left for the good ones.”

And so that was all the pity Sir Edward Bertram’s lost heir got from the learned Vice-Principal of —— College.

Just before Robinson left Dr. Brown’s library, Lynx came sniffing in. He had been on a lawless hunting expedition on his own account, and had only just returned in time to discover the presence of his old aversion on the premises. He had bounded up the stairs with the greatest eagerness, and entered the room with almost a chuckle of a growl, when he found that he was not too late to go through his tormenting exhibition.

Alas for poor Lynx's laudable ambition! Dr. Brown detected his purpose, and, calling him to his side, made him lie down while Jeffery Robinson made his escape from the threatened insult.

When the two met again, poor faithful old Lynx was almost too aged to enter his lengthy and public protest against sullen natures and bad temper, even had he wished.





CHAPTER XI.

A SWIMMING MATCH WITH A WHALE.

“**M**Y boy, I am come to carry you up on deck ; will you let **AO** me ? Dr. Clarke says that it will do you good.”

The speaker was Captain Pender, and the person he addressed with a voice of such kind solicitude was a long, lanky, hollow-eyed young chap, with as few pretensions to good looks as one might expect to see in a day's march. And yet, if you could have seen how he was being gazed at by the captain, and Bill Anderson, and the first mate, the good Scotchman, Macgregor, you would really have supposed that they considered him the most glorious object that their eyes could rest upon.

Well then, to tell the truth—perhaps they did. And you need not quarrel with them very greatly for their bad taste either ; for whenever you suffer a blow to save a smaller boy from getting it, you think yourself something of a hero, and Ned Bertram had put himself in danger of death, and nearly suffered it too, to save the lives of others.

He did not appear to have much consciousness either that he had elevated himself into the ranks of the heroes. But then, certainly, he had only the day before recovered consciousness of anything, so that he had not as yet had much time to trouble his head about questions of moral philosophy

or metaphysics, or any other abstruse science that might teach him the precise thoughts and ways and deeds that go to the making up a hero.

It is queer to hear people sometimes talking of heroes as if they were compositions, like mincemeat, to be made out of certain given ingredients, duly weighed and measured. The only absolutely *quite* necessary ingredients in the recipe are generally left out—

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

However, to return to the small group collected in Edward Bertram’s crib of a cabin—rather, we should say, around its door, for Edward Bertram in his hammock, and Captain Pender beside it, were as many human beings as it would contain.

The chief mate, the doctor, and honest Bill Anderson had to content themselves with peering in upon him from the outside, while his two nurses during his illness, Mrs. Johnson and poor Mrs. Downing, mopped their eyes and giggled hysterically in the background.

When the captain asked Ned if he might carry him up on deck, Ned’s face flushed a little, partly with pleasure at the prospect of getting out of his close quarters, and partly at the suggestion that he should be carried.

“I thank you, sir. It will be very jolly to get up on deck again; but—but—I don’t think I need trouble you.”

“Trouble! my boy; trouble! Why, your weight now wouldn’t outbalance that of a rope’s end, I believe. Come along.”

But still Ned made no sign of “coming along”—that was of letting the captain lift him up; and Bill grunted—

“Fact is, cap’n, sir, I believe t’ yoong gentleman thinks carryin’ an’ being a babby goos togither. Let un try to get up

on deck hisself, sir. Joost let un have a try, that's all, as he be so mighty vain o' his strength."

"Oh ! that's it, is it?" exclaimed the captain. "By all manner of means make the attempt for yourself. Only don't blame us if you tumble down and get hurt."

"No, of course not," said Ned eagerly, as he began to raise himself in the hammock. "But I'm sure I can manage it."

"Oh ! o' coarse," muttered the sailor; "an' puffin' an' blowin' like a grampus a'ready."

The next moment there was a pitiful cry from Ned, and from the captain a half-laughing, half-angry—

"There, you obstinate fellow ! If I hadn't been on the look-out to catch you, knowing what would happen, you would have been really done-for this time."

And then, having got the helpless invalid in his arms, without further ado Captain Pender marched off with him, and soon had him comfortably ensconced in a quiet, sunny corner on deck, for there was a fresh breeze blowing, and the sun was not unwelcome. It must be remembered that this sailing vessel, the *Good Bess*, was rapidly making way towards winter, not summer, and the end of May was the end of autumn with her then rather than the end of spring. But whatever the season might choose to call itself, or to be called, was a matter of the most perfect indifference to Ned as he lay rejoicing in the feeling of returning health.

He found considerable satisfaction too in relieving his injured feelings by a mutter to Bill Anderson.

"You know, Anderson, I don't care a bit about your laughing at me like that—not a bit. If the captain hadn't gone swathing me up like a mummy in this gigantic North Pole sort of a dressing-gown thing, I could have got out of my hammock and up on deck as well as you could have done."

"Ay, ay, to be sure, sir, as well as I could have done, if

I'd been ill o' brain fever for three weeks an' more. O' coarse yer could, sir ; o' coarse yer could."

"Oh ! well, Bill, if you are going on like that, I shan't argue with you," said Ned, and he turned over on his improvised couch with a contented sigh, and fell asleep.

When he awoke, there was a great commotion going on on deck.

"What's up ?" he exclaimed eagerly.

But everyone was too excited to answer him. Some were rushing one way, some another. The faces of some were lighted up with expressions of the greatest glee, the faces of others betokened apprehension and alarm.

"What's up ?" he called again ; but equally in vain.

Then he tried to rise, but the effort was too much for him, and made him feel faint. He was obliged to sink back again, and try to make out the mystery by using his eyes.

At a short distance from the ship, rising and falling on the waves, he could see a boat. Near it, half in, half out of the water, was a great dark object, looking like another boat turned upside down. Was it possible that there had been a great accident while he was asleep ?

Ned's interest and curiosity grew intense, and he was the more puzzled, inasmuch as the boat, which was right side uppermost and filled with sailors, appeared so uncertain in its movements, now making a sudden dash forward towards the other, and then, when it had managed to get tolerably close, pulling away from it again as though it were some fatal whirlpool.

Ned's head was beginning to throb painfully with bewilderment, when Jack, the ghost believer, came by.

"Jack ! I say, Jack ! stop a moment, there's a good fellow, do."

"Ay, ay, sir. Glad to see you looking finely again, sir."

"Thanks, Jack. But tell me, what's everybody looking at ? What's that boat out there for ?"

Jack frowned and shuddered, and turned pale.

"That boat out there, Mr. Bertram, is engaged in a impious work. The men are tryin' to ketch the whale sent by the Lord to swaller up our Jonah down below."

Ned stared, as well he might. And what amount of truth he would have gleaned in time out of this astounding piece of information it is impossible to say, for at that moment Bill Anderson came bustling up, his whole face aglow with eagerness and gratification, and with hardly breath enough to speak.

"Heart alive, Mr. Bertram," he exclaimed; and then he had to stop to breathe before he could go on. "Heart alive, but if you ain't in luck to be able to come on deck this identical day. We've a sight to show you now, as I'll be bound they ain't never showed ye at your schools, an' yer cricket fields, an' yer footballings."

"Very likely, Bill. But what is it? Is it really a whale?"

"Well, now, ain't I coom a purpose to take ye to see for yerself. Only, mebbe," with a slight grin, "ye'll be being too proud to be carried by me where ye can see the sight?"

"Nonsense, Anderson, don't tease."

Ah! there was a shout.

"Oh, do make haste, all the fun will be over."

"Hey! Misther Berthram, sir, an' is it fun ye call it," cried a poor Irishwoman. "An' it's Biddy, meself, that am thinking the monsther'll be after heaving the ship of us over, the on-mannerly baste."

"If it doesna ha' the ship over, it'll ha' th' boat over, if yon lubbers dinna look out," growled Bill, as he laid down Bertram in a position from which he could very well see the whole of the sport.

A huge creature was the whale that had been unwise enough to come to close quarters with the *Good Bess*. A splendid creature one or two of the passengers were calling it.

But with that verdict Ned could not agree, unless size alone rendered it worthy of the praise. It certainly could not boast of any beauty of outward appearance, for it was so completely hung round and covered over with masses of seaweed and barnacles, that it resembled nothing so much as a gigantic log of timber put to soak in the water.

As the monster rolled slowly and heavily in the green ocean, and once came with a great, lurching shock up against the ship, most of the women emigrants shrieked, and some of the sterner sex looked as though they would not be sorry if it were dead or departed.

Now was the time, thought one of these exiles, to distinguish himself. He had left his home in his native village with the full intention of distinguishing himself, and here was the very opportunity for doing it.

He had never, as yet, been very clear in his own mind as to how he would set about making himself famous. But here was the very thing to his hand. There was a whale to be killed, and he would kill it, and be famous.

That was a nice little programme, very nice, but, unfortunately, drawing up a programme is not always dancing it. Our young friend, however, proceeded to dance through his in fine style, but not quite to the tune he expected.

On leaving his country home, Tony Lumpkin bought a rusty old musket, that had done good service in the wars thirty years ago. He had never fired off anything in his life, as yet. But he said he must be provided with firearms to shoot the lions and tigers, and other such companions, in the country he was going to.

Some one suggested that he had heard lions and tigers did not abound in Australia. But who was going to pay heed to what *he* said! He was a poor-spirited creature, who had never dreamt of making up his mind to be distinguished. Tony Lumpkin knew better than to pay heed to what *he* had heard.

And so he bought his musket, and paid for it, and for some balls and powder too, and stored his delightful new possessions carefully away in his travelling trunk for future use. And, lo and behold! that future had arrived.

To shoot a whale at sea would be at least as glorious an achievement as shooting a lion on land. And—a consideration not to be lost sight of, even when one did wish to be distinguished—perhaps, of the two enterprises, it looked as if it might be a trifle the safer.

Accordingly, while the boatful of sailors was lowered into the water, Tony Lumpkin, or country bumpkin, whichever you please to call him, unearthed his treasures. He crammed down the poor, ill-used old musket three charges of powder and three balls.

“I’ll do for the big beast,” chuckled Mr. Tony. “I’ll do for him, see if I don’t, sure as eggs is eggs. No use a doin’ things skimpily when it’s a question of a ten-yard-long brute like this’n yonder. It’ll take the whole hog to make *him* into sausages, sure as my name’s Lumpkin.”

And so, by way of giving the whale the benefit of the “whole hog,” on the top of the three charges of powder and the three balls Mr. Tony Lumpkin generously sprinkled down a pinch or two more powder, as he had seen his mother, now and again, put a handful more currants into the batch of Christmas puddings. Then he marched up on deck.

A suspicion that the captain, and the mates, and the sailors might envy him his approaching triumph, and jealously try to prevent his obtaining it, made him carefully conceal his truly formidable weapon inside his coat until he gained a favourable position and opportunity for its discharge.

Anderson had just placed Edward Bertram comfortably, and the excitement of a series of more spirited movements on the part of the whale had brought everyone

around the lad, when there was a sudden rush and triumphant shout.

Tony Lumpkin was to the fore. With one exulting wave of the rusty musket, and an exulting cry—"Look out, all of ye, I'll do for him!" he put the weapon to his shoulder, put his finger to the trigger, and fired.

"Stop!" "Stop, you fool!" "Stop him!" shouted three voices simultaneously.

Too late. The shouts of "Stop him!" were succeeded, with scarcely a moment's pause, by a yell, a sharp cry, and a perfectly deafening torrent of shrieks.

The yell was uttered by Tony Lumpkin himself, who fell to the ground with a hand nearly shattered to bits. The badly-treated, worthy old musket had revenged itself for ill-usage in its old age by bursting, as might have been expected. If magnificent hunters could die before they come down to drawing hansom cabs, no doubt they would do so, just as lobsters prefer to give up a claw to demeaning themselves to ask for liberty of an adversary.

But the musket would have behaved more fairly had it confined its revenge to its ignorant owner, instead of dealing pain, and danger, and confusion all around it, amongst those who were innocent even of the knowledge of its existence.

The yell, as has been said, was uttered by the unfortunate Tony himself. The sharp cry was extorted from a gentleman who was struck just over the region of the heart by a piece of the lock. He must have been killed on the spot, had he not been fortunate enough to have a half-crown in his waistcoat pocket, which stopped the course of the missile. Money is of some use, evidently, even where there are no shops. Mind you, always keep a half-crown in your waistcoat pocket; you are sure to be glad of it some day. Tell your relations, you know, how valuable it *may* prove to you. And when one melts away, you had better try to get another!



TONY LUMPKIN SHOOTS AT A WHALE.



If you want to know who uttered the perfectly deafening torrent of shrieks, the fact is, "Want must be your master," unless you would like the passengers' lists and the crew list copied out for you. For very little less than that would answer your question. Everybody shrieked who had a shriek in him (or her). And good reason, too.

Whales cannot stand fire. They have not been brought up to that sort of thing, and don't know what to make of it, any more than cows used to do of railway trains. Now-a-days cows are accustomed to trains, and don't mind them a bit; and no doubt, if plenty of people amused themselves with bursting guns over whales, whales would get accustomed to the sound, and not mind it a bit. Hitherto, however, the experiment has not been tried, and certainly it had not been in 1837, when not even telephones and phonographs had been thought of. Accordingly, when that poor, stupid Tony Lumpkin made all that horrible uproar with his musket at the most inopportune moment he could have chosen, the whale was startled out of its seven senses. It gave a great lunge forward, and a bound, and flung up its tail into the air. And up into the air with its tail went the boat, and the ten men in it; the men and the tail and the boat all coming down again together with a most tremendous, simultaneous flop! Now, do you wonder that some screams were heard?

Happily, all the men could swim, and the wind had fallen to a dead calm before the captain let his men amuse themselves with an hour's whale-fishing. But although things were so far in their favour, matters were more than serious enough. Swimming in company with an agitated whale might be more than either Captain Webb or Captain Boyton would care for as an amusement. Some of the men dodged the leviathan, caught the ropes thrown out, and got on board; one man scrambled on to the upturned boat. But two or three of the men began to look exhausted.

Another champion appeared upon the scene. It was no Tony Lumpkin this time, not even a first cousin of that race, but a grandee of a passenger travelling for amusement's sake. He had been asleep in his own sumptuous private cabin during the first part of the excitement, and only came out just in time to see the final catastrophe produced by his ambitious countryman.

He looked on a few moments at the swimming men, and at the spouting, snorting, floundering monster, and then hastened back to his cabin. It was the work of a minute to get out his revolver, return to the ship's side, and lodge the first bullet in the whale's back.

Alas! except to make it more stormy in its movements, the bullet might as well have been a sugar-plum, for all the effect it seemed to have.

"Ah! Mr. Murray, sir, help us!" cried one of the poor fellows in the water, who had swum from side to side of the ship a dozen times, only to find the whale each time there before him.

"I will, my man, I will," he shouted back, adding, in a lower tone, a fervent "please God." And throwing one of his pistols to a sailor clinging to the boat, who cleverly caught it, the man took a steady aim and fired.

There was a great plunge. A second report. A faint flap of the tail, a roll over, and the whale was dead. The men and the boat were rescued, the wounded Tony Lumpkin was carried off to the doctor's quarters, and Dr. Clarke gave orders, before going to attend to his new patient—

"Anderson, carry that boy down, and put him back in his hammock directly. He'd no business to have all this excitement the first day of coming on deck."

So Ned Bertram was forthwith conveyed below, and saw no more sights that night. He had his supper given to him, and was ordered to go to sleep.

“But what is going to be done with the whale, Anderson?”

“Go to sleep.”

And then the cabin door was shut, so it was no good Ned grumbling out—

“You surly, old, ill-natured bear!”

There was no one to heed or reply to the grunt.





CHAPTER XII.

“WHERE'S STORTON?”

WHEN Captain Pender made his appearance, the day after the whale adventure, in Ned's cabin, he met no repulse of his kind offer to carry him on deck again. Having arranged the boy and his wraps, with fatherly solicitude, he seated himself beside him for a few minutes' conversation.

“Bertram, I fear that it is scarcely right to recall terrible memories to you, but remember, if for the future I do not allude to them, it will not be because I have forgotten, or can ever forget, the patient, splendid nobility of your late conduct. Nothing, I confess, but the awful proof, gained through your steady determination, of that Storton's villainy would have ever induced me to believe in its depth, or to take sufficient precautions against it.

Ned had turned very white, and shivered.

“There, my boy, we will talk of something pleasanter; I shall have that tyrant, Dr. Clarke, declaring that it is necessary for my health that I should lose a double tooth, by way of punishing me for throwing his patient back.”

Ned smiled. No one on board would have dared to make that joke about the captain but the captain himself.

Captain Pender would have walked up to the muzzle of a gun about to be fired as coolly as he would have walked into a

dining-room, had duty appeared to dictate such a step ; but when it came to a question of having a tooth drawn—if the truth must be confessed—Captain Pender was an awful coward. He excused himself to himself by saying, “ I can’t help it.” He excused himself to other people, after a fashion, by frightening them out of daring to allude to the undignified characteristic.

His allusion to tooth-drawing, by way of changing the conversation, was one of the greatest proofs that he could have given Bertram of his fatherly care for him. Unfortunately, his magnanimity was wasted, for Ned harked back to the former topic himself. After he felt his own hands drag down the straw matches, and Storton’s hand fasten on his throat, he knew nothing more until, two days ago, he had opened his eyes wearily in his narrow slip of a cabin, and seen Mrs. Downing holding a cup, with a camphorish smell about it, to his lips. And he wanted to know more.

There was a short pause, however, after Captain Pender’s mention of the doctor. Neither of the companions appeared to be very ready with that “ something pleasanter ” to talk of. Ned looked out at the sea, and tried to collect his thoughts. And the captain looked at Ned, and puzzled his brains, as he had often done before, as to what sort of a horrible old wretch the great-uncle must be, who had shown himself so indifferent to such a first-rate young nephew. For, of course, Bertram had long ago been called upon for his autobiography.

At last Ned thought of one very palpable question to ask—
“ How was I saved, sir ? ”

“ Mr. Macgregor and Bill Anderson were on the search for you.”

An inward thanksgiving rose up in Ned’s heart. Since he found the ship safe, and all on it, he was not at all sorry to find himself safe too.

“ And how about—about—Storton—sir ; where is he ? ”

"Where he was before."

"No! never!" exclaimed Ned, starting up with the false strength given him by surprise and apprehension.

Captain Pender pulled him back again and pushed him down.

"Don't go flying off on a wrong tack in that fashion, you impatient fellow. You're as bad as a woman. Although Storton is in the same place as before, neither the spirits of wine nor the gunpowder are in the same places they occupied before. They are now pretty nearly as far removed from him as the space of the ship will permit. Does that satisfy you?"

"Yes," answered Ned simply, but his face gave a far more emphatic assent than his tongue thought needful.

"For your further re-assurance," continued his friend, "I may as well tell you that Storton is so secured now, that, with all his clever power to distend and contract his muscles, not even his ingenuity can set him free."

"I hope not," murmured Ned. He was impressed with a tremendous idea of the forger's powers. "What are you going to do with him when we reach Sydney, sir?"

Captain Pender's face looked very grim. "Get him hung, I hope."

Ned shuddered, and the captain thought, regretfully, that it was owing to his thoughtlessness in reminding him of the painful episode of his own first rough welcoming on board. He tried to rally him.

"How could you be so foolish, Bertram, by-the-bye, as to believe my joking threat, that day you were fished out of the hold, that I would hang *you*?"

Ned's thoughts had, in reality, travelled so far from himself, that he did not at once remember to what his companion alluded; but when he did, he answered readily enough—

"I don't see how I was to help believing you. The way you

put the matter seemed so just and plain. If I lived I should have to have food, and I hadn't got any money to pay for it. And you'd no call to feed me for nothing, so you settled to hang me."

Captain Pender burst out into a loud, long fit of laughter at the calm simplicity of Ned's way of stating the matter. It certainly had an air of plain reasonableness about it that might recommend it to the meanest capacity.

"Really, my boy, we shall have to make you a lawyer instead of a sailor, you know, if you argue like this. I had no idea that you had such a knack of hitting the nail on the head. But I'm afraid that the world would look a bit queerish, and get rather empty, if everyone was hung who was found where he was not wanted. Pray, though, what are you looking so grave about?"

"It's a horrible thought that that Storton is all alone down in that black hole, to wait weeks, and weeks, and weeks—ah! how terrible!—only to be hung at last!"

"Well, my boy, I should not think that you need waste much pity on him, for he tried his best to do for you. That's one of the things that will help to get him hung."

"Poor wretch!" murmured Ned again. "Is there no hope for him, sir?"

"I fervently trust not, unless we are in danger of shipwreck, and then he shall have his chance of swimming for his life with the rest of us."





CHAPTER XIII.

CAST OUT.

JUST to give an idea of the course of Edward Bertram's voyage to Australia in 1837, it may be as well to mention shortly that the *Good Bess* left England on the 23rd of March.

On the 27th of May, when the whale adventure took place, the two islands of Trinidad and Martin Vas were in sight, about 600 miles off the coast of South America; and on the 1st of June Ned got his first clear view of the constellation of the Southern Cross.

On the 12th of June, after having experienced considerable difficulty from contrary winds, and squally, wintry weather, they rounded the Cape of Good Hope, that undiscovered goal of the hopes of the earnest-hearted Portuguese, Prince Henry, in the 15th century; and now, when the present chapter opens, on the 28th of July, the *Good Bess* is still beating about in the Indian Ocean, many and many a long hundred miles from its destination.

Provisions are growing scarce, Captain Pender's face is growing very long, and the emigrants have become too depressed, anxious, and weary to grumble any more.

That terrible 28th of July wore on. No sign appeared of a change for the better in the wind.

It was Ned's fifteenth birthday. He had grown much taller

and stronger since his illness than he was before, and was now a stalwart, manly-looking youth, whom not even his former monitor, Robinson, would have thought of flogging.

But Ned had almost forgotten Errington and his school-fellows, as he sat for nearly an hour watching the sea, which had been gradually settling into a sullen calm since the morning.

The sailor Bill came up and stood beside him.

"Anderson, when do you think there is a chance of an alteration in this state of things?"

"Before night, sir."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Ned—or rather he began the exclamation, but it died upon his lips before he had fairly uttered it, for a strange whistling wind swept suddenly across the ship at that moment, as though mocking him, and Bill's hand came heavily down upon his shoulder.

"Whist ye, then, young gentleman! There's naught to call for hurrahing."

"But you said—you said," began Ned, stammering, for his companion's gloomy tones had fairly daunted him—"you said the wind would change."

"And so it will—so it has—but I did not say for the better."

A second of those weird, wailing winds that in Ireland you hear called "the Banshee's Warning" swept swift and sharply overhead.

For a moment the *Good Bess* was motionless. A terrible, waiting silence reigned on board. Then a strong quiver shook every timber of the vessel, as though it were a living thing, and shuddering from fear.

Ned instinctively started up from his post and looked around him. The first thing that met his eyes was the face of Captain Pender, so white and set that it looked almost as though it were carved in stone, except for the open mouth issuing rapid orders.

Some of the emigrant women were clutching their children to them; others of the passengers—men and women alike—were cowering together in huddled masses, awaiting in panic-stricken terror some calamity, they scarcely comprehended of what nature.

A third of those horrible, unearthly shrieks, longer and stronger than its predecessors. The masts creaked and bent before it, and all useless hands were sent below. The sea, that had fallen to the dead-level of a lake, began to heave and surge. The scudding clouds seemed suddenly to settle and thicken. The whole sky was darkened. The very act of breathing became an effort.

Then the wind began to gather up—slowly at first, with a sort of murmur—a warning—such a warning as a lion's growl may be to an unarmed man. The sea rose higher and higher, green, crested-looking, lashing waves rising to the deluge pouring down from above. Then the storm broke in all its fury. Two men were lashed to the helm.

The waves, as they towered up and rushed in torrents over the ship's sides, dashed the men hither and thither, leaving the vessel helpless, to be driven as the wind would. The thunder bellowed and roared, and the lightning revealed a red, lurid sky when it made a path of light for itself athwart the hail and rain and drift.

"Get below, my boy," said Captain Pender, coming across Edward Bertram kneeling on the flooded deck, with his arms about a mast to save himself from being washed overboard. "If we have to take to the boats, I will see that you have timely notice."

"Then are we in danger, sir?"

"Yes."

"You said Storton would be set free if we were."

"Thinking of him now! Well, if Anderson chooses to bring him on deck, he can."

Then the captain went on, and Ned, leaving the mast, and clinging first to one thing and then another, made his way below, found the key of Storton's narrow dungeon, and persuaded Anderson, who had just been relieved from his exhausting duty at the helm, and come below for a few minutes' rest, to go with him to release the prisoner.

"But we'll not give ye too much liberty, lest ye should tak' it into your head to give the winds and waves a helping hand to our hurt," said the sailor, as he detached the handcuffs from the mast instead of from Storton's wrists, and then he helped him up on deck, for his long confinement in irons had made his limbs almost useless to him.

Just then there was a lull in the capricious wind, and Ned, in his ignorance, began to think that they had weathered the gale.

"The storm has not done us much harm after all, Jack," he said triumphantly, as the tall sailor drew near him and his ill-conditioned companion.

"Not yet," muttered Jack, as he stood staring with mingled fear and hatred at Storton. "It has spared us as yet, sir; but so long as yon ne'er-do-well is to be amongst us, we'll have to go to the bottom in his company."

As though to prove the truth of his gloomy prognostications, his last words were lost in the renewed roaring of the wind. Again the waves dashed over the decks, and threatened to wash everything overboard.

Each blast grew fiercer. From below, shrieks of agonised terror pierced even above the storm. Then a giant mast came crashing down, killing one of the sailors in its fall, and the scene of confusion on deck was at its height when a cry came, sharp and shrill—

"Rocks ahead!"

The warning was too late. In the awful tempest then raging it must have been useless, however, any way. Ropes creaking, masts crashing, the winds appearing to come from every point

of the compass at the same moment, the helm well-nigh useless, the unfortunate vessel was driven helplessly where the waves took it, whenever one of those long gusts came upon it.

Another moment and there was a tremendous shock. This was the crowning stroke of calamity. Every one began to crowd up on deck, with faces that sufficiently betokened a comprehension of the awfulness of the situation.

Not an oath was heard, not a rash word, death was too near. With every dash of the waves the vessel rose, and then settled down more firmly upon the rocks, with that fatal vibration and crunching sound which foretold inevitable destruction.

Soon the sheathing-boards from the bottom of the vessel began to float away. Efforts were made to lighten her. Casks, oil-jars, old iron, refuse stores of all kinds, were cast overboard, and then the scene of horror was completed by a terrible act of superstition.

"It is useless to throw over anything more," exclaimed Captain Pender at last. "The tide is sinking, and the ship is lost, unless it can hold together for the next few hours or more. You are wasting your strength in vain."

"Ay, in throwing overboard that lumber, captain," cried long Jack, suddenly starting forward to where Captain Pender, the chief mate, Ned, and the lately liberated prisoner were gathered together in a group.

"It's wasting o' strength to cast out they senseless goods an' chattels, but there's some'at else to cast out o' our midst. Some'at," he continued, wildly flinging up his arms, "that has brought all these evils upon our heads. An' if so be as we mun go, he shall go first."

Thus saying, he suddenly stooped down over Storton, lifted him with all a madman's strength, dashed forward to the vessel's side before anyone could divine his purpose or hinder it, and the next instant a piercing shriek broke above the tumult of the storm—

"I am bound, you wretch!"

Then there was a plunge into the oncoming wave, a shout of triumph from the poor madman, and a rush to the vessel's side of those who had witnessed the dreadful scene.

A moment later, a second cry of horror and consternation burst forth simultaneously from several throats. Some one else had taken a flying leap clear of the rocks, and plunged into the wild turmoil of the waters beside the white face of Storton, which had not yet had time to be battered out of human semblance.

Those by the tossing vessel's side looked round upon each other. Who was it that had taken useless pity on the drowning man? All were there still but the boy Edward Bertram. It was he who had offered up his young life for mercy's sake to the man who had tried to kill him. Captain Pender dropped his face into his hands with a groan. A bright, brave life flung away like that did appear too terrible. But these were not moments to spend in vain regret. Another giant wave dashed against the maimed *Good Bess*, and Macgregor muttered in a low tone—

"Not much need to grieve over the lad, Pender, he's only forestalled his fate by an hour or so. No boats could live in this sea."

"But the ship may!" shouted long Jack, as the wind with redoubled force gathered up the falling waves before it was too late, and, ere any one could say how it happened, the *Good Bess* was off the rocks and driving before the blast.

The same waves that dashed up under the ship, raised it, and carried it back to the ocean with them, carried the bodies of Storton and Edward Bertram over some rocks at a short distance off, and washed them securely into an inland cleft, where they were saved from all further efforts of the tempest to dislodge them.



CHAPTER XIV.

PINEAPPLES FOR DESSERT, BUT NO DINNER.

"WHAT in the world is the matter with my hammock?"

So grumbled a boy's voice, as the speaker tried to find an easy position for his head amongst some sharp-pointed rocks where it lay.

"Ah, I am so glad!" exclaimed another voice. "Then you are not dead?"

"Dead! no, I am not dead. Why should I be? Oh! I remember now," cried Edward Bertram, raising himself with some difficulty into a sitting posture, and looking about him with surprise and anxiety. "I jumped over after that Storton; not that there was much chance of saving him, but he'd got his arms fastened together, and I wouldn't throw a dog over like that."

"Was he thrown over? How dreadful."

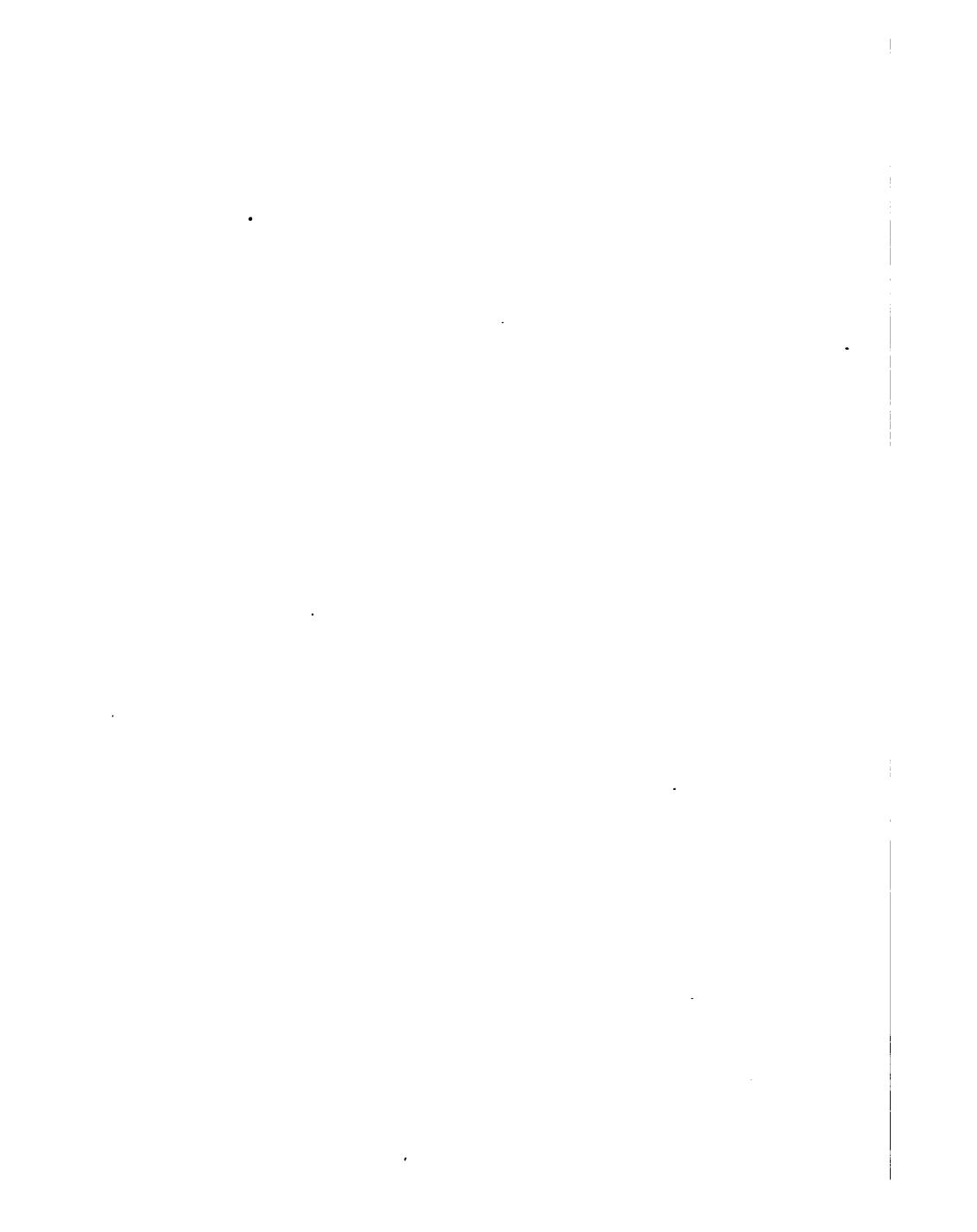
"Yes; but I wonder who you are, and how you come to be here?" questioned Ned, staring with all his eyes at his companion, a girl with fair hair and blue eyes about the same age as himself. "Have I been washed up on to English rocks, with a bit of London growing on them?"

The girl laughed merrily, but there was some sadness in her voice as she answered—

"No, indeed; I wish you had, if I and my father were there



CAST UP BY THE SEA.



too. We were shipwrecked off here a fortnight ago, on our way to England, and no one was saved but my sister and I, and our father. We escaped on a raft, but all the others scrambled into the boats and got swamped."

"Umph," said Ned, but he had not above half-heard her last words, for, in peering about to discover something of his present whereabouts, his eyes had lighted upon an object a yard or so further on in the grotto where he lay, and his interest in that object instantly grew very great.

"Had you any one with chains on aboard your ship?" he asked his companion after a moment's pause.

"I don't think so. I expect that poor fellow yonder must be the man you jumped over after. But it's no good troubling about him any more, for I am sure he's dead; I've looked at him ever so many times."

"That's just like a girl," was the rather contemptuous answer. "You'd have gone away in another minute, I expect, declaring that I was dead, if these abominable craggy rocks hadn't hurt my head so that I was obliged to open my eyes to look at them. Perhaps Storton's been pitched into a more comfortable sleeping-place."

So saying, Ned raised himself to his feet, with one or two groans extorted by the bruises with which he was pretty well covered from head to foot, and, stepping over on to a floor of shining white sand, in another moment he reached Storton's side, and at once exclaimed triumphantly—

"There now, Miss What's-your-name! I'm right and you are wrong, for he is alive."

And so Storton truly was. In fact, neither he nor Bertram had been long enough in the water to be drowned, and as they had mercifully been lifted over the rocks instead of being dashed to pieces against them, there was little matter for wonder, in reality, that neither of them had suffered more than temporary unconsciousness.

Short, however, as the time had been between Storton's release from his small ship dungeon and the moment when Ned stood beside him in the grotto, a marvellous change had passed over the man's nature. As he gazed up, helpless and hopeless, from the boiling ocean, he had seen Ned plunge into that furious sea after him, and an irresistible wave of gratitude had risen up in his heart and swept away his wickedness, as the waves of wholesome air often sweep away a pestilence.

"Surely you cannot really be glad to see that I am alive?" he now asked, with dimmed eyes gazing up at the boy whom he had but a few weeks before treated so barbarously.

"But indeed and I just am, then," was the hearty answer.

"And you are not afraid of me any longer?"

"Not a bit; and to prove that, I'm going to get you out of these things without further delay."

No sooner said than done. Ned pressed his finger on the spring locks of the handcuffs, and had them off in a moment, flinging them down with a shout of triumph, which Storton more gravely echoed as he found himself once more a free man.

"So far so good," exclaimed Bertram. "Now the next thing is to see where the ship is."

"You cannot do that," said the young lady, "for it got off the rocks just as you were thrown up here, and while I was running down to signal it to send us help. It's out of sight now."

"Whew! Well, the next thing, then, must be to learn where we are, and what we are going to do for food. Perhaps, Miss What's-your-name, you can tell us?"

"The first piece of information that I shall give you is, that my name is Rosa Bell, and not Miss What's-your-name."

"And my name is Ned Bertram, at your service, and this gentleman is Mr. Storton, and we are both very hungry."

"I am very sorry for that. I hoped you wouldn't be hungry

till it got dark," said Rosa Bell gravely. "However, I suppose I must try to get you something to eat at once, if you very much wish it."

"Why should we trouble you?" said Storton, coming forward. "Let us try for ourselves, and for you too, if you will."

"Oh no!" she exclaimed in sudden alarm, and trying to block up the exit of the grotto with her slight figure. "You must not come out. The only chance for all our lives is in your keeping free. We are not on a perfectly desert island, unfortunately. Josephine and I are left to go where we will, but our father is kept bound to a tree near the middle of the island; and one of the women has made us understand by signs that, when all the fruit has been gathered up here, and the shells that are thrown up by the storms at this season, they shall cross over to another island, and take us girls with them, but kill our father and throw him into the sea. And if——"

"If they catch us," interrupted Ned, "no doubt they will do the same by us."

"Yes," began Rosa, but once more she was interrupted. This time it was by a low, soft whistle, like a bird's evening call to its mate.

Miss Rosa ran quickly a few yards away from the grotto, and then answered the call with a similar one, when out from a miniature jungle jumped a child four or five years younger than herself, and flew to meet her, leaping and wading across the belt of water that divided the reef from the island.

"Rosie, Rosie," came the smothered exclamation, "if only we were men now instead of girls, I believe we could manage to get the island to ourselves, and set papa free."

"Come here and explain what you mean," said Rosa, pulling the child eagerly forward into the grotto.

Josephine retreated in alarm when she saw the strangers, but Storton came forward and put her long curls back from her face, as he said kindly—

"We are friends—shipwrecked like you in a manner. Perhaps we have just got here in time to help you."

"If you can manage to get the guns, you have," said the little girl, rapidly regaining confidence, especially as she saw that one of the new-comers was only a boy, and a very good-tempered-looking one besides.

"Guns! What guns, and where are they?" asked Ned. "If we'd only got a couple of good rifles and powder and shot, we'd soon frighten away any number of poor niggers from their own possessions, I'll venture to declare."

"Follow me, then," said Josephine, "and you shall have not only two, but three rifles, if only you have the courage to take them."

So saying she advanced from the grotto, and Ned and Storton began to obey her leadership, when Rosa started forward and exclaimed, half-angrily, "Stop, stop! Have you lost your wits, Pheenie? How in the world are two men to knock down twenty or thirty? And you know perfectly well that the natives won't give up the guns willingly."

"Of course I know that as well as you do," said Pheenie, in an offended tone. "But there won't be much knocking down to do—most of them have knocked themselves down. They have been drinking that wine sort of stuff which they make out of the cocoanut milk ever since you went away from our hut, and now all but one or two of them are as tipsy as ever they can be. Some are fast asleep, and scarcely any of them can stand up."

Rosa made no further opposition. If any successful effort were to be made for life and liberty, evidently the present was the time to make it.

"But you must be silent—ever so silent," whispered little Pheenie, as she led her companions in and out wherever the weedy grass grew highest, or a palm trunk offered any screen.

"I think," said Rosa, "that these islanders have dog's ears

and cat's eyes. They hear the wind before I know it has commenced to blow, and they can see the tiniest white grub inside the bark of a tree ever so high up."

"I wish *I* could see anything in the shape of food anywhere," whispered hungry Ned.

"So you can," said Rosa, with a low laugh. "There's some."

"Possibly, for people in a balloon," muttered her companion disconsolately, as his gaze followed the direction of her finger to the crown of a stately cabbage-palm.

"But really," he added, after a pause of a few moments under the tree, "I don't see that there is very much there, even if I could get up to the top of it."

"All the same, there is something, and a very good something too, for I have tasted it," remarked Josephine, coming back to see why her followers were loitering.

"Well then," continued Ned, still doubtfully, "all I can say is, it ought to be good to pay for the climb up to get it."

"The natives did not trouble themselves to climb up for the one we helped to eat," whispered Rosa. "They just burnt a great fire round it till the trunk was nearly burnt through, and then moved a good way off and quietly waited for it to tumble down, when they cut out the big cabbage at the top at their ease."

"And wasted all the rest of the tree?"

"They did that because it was not a very good one; but of another, as fine as this, they burnt out the middle a good way down, burnt off the two ends, and made a canoe."

"Ah!" ejaculated Storton suddenly. "Of course. I have heard of that being done. And, Bertram, let us be sure to take care of my irons; they may be made into first-rate tools, for want of others."

Storton's conviction of the certain future usefulness of those irons grew so strong that he prevailed on his companions to

let him return for them at once. And it was well he did so.

As the little party approached the grotto, and were far enough, as they imagined, from all listeners or observers, Storton, who was foremost, stopped short, and exclaimed incautiously—

“ Ha ! What animals have you on the island ? ”

“ None, except— ”

One of the exceptions stopped further information with a yell and a rush from the rocky cave, brandishing the irons in his dark hands. The startled Storton and the two girls sprang out of his pathway ; not so Ned, however.

Remembering, almost from instinct, the common schoolboy trick, he made no attempt to seize or catch the slippery native, but he flung himself down before him. Over Ned, upon his nose, tumbled the darkie ; in an instant Ned was on the top of him, snatching at the precious tools of the future.

The struggle was short and desperate, but decisive, and before the others could interfere, Ned jumped up with the prizes of victory in his hands, and his opponent’s dusky feet were flying over the jagged, slippery, surf-beaten rocks as easily and securely as ours could do over a field of grass.

Ned pushed back the tumbled locks from his forehead, and clapped himself on the back, with his favourite exclamation, “ So far so good.”

“ So far so bad,” cried Rosa, wringing her hands, and great tears gathering in her eyes. “ Oh, how could you let him go ? Just fancy keeping those stupid bits of iron instead of the man. Oh, how could you ? ”

“ Why, what do you mean ? ” asked Ned in rueful astonishment, dropping his despised trophies and rumpling up his hair. “ I don’t understand you. It was the irons we wanted, and not the nigger, wasn’t it ? ”

“ Of course ; I know that,” said Rosa impatiently. “ But

don't you see, you dreadfully stupid boy, that you have let that native escape to go and wake up all the others, and bring them down upon you, and then all is lost."

"But, Rosie, look," said that sharp-witted little Pheenie ; "he's keeping all along by the sea. He is not going inland, or at all in the direction of the village. If we are quick, perhaps we may reach the others before he will, and get the guns after all."

"That's one for you, Miss Josephine," said Ned, brightening up again ; "but do you think that perhaps he has got some more friends there upon the beach whom he is fetching down upon us?"

"I hope not," answered the little girl, turning pale at the suggestion.

Meantime, Rosa had flown a few yards along the rough beach, almost as swiftly as the native himself, and she now came leaping back from crag to crag, beckoning excitedly to the others.

"What's up now?" asked Storton, as they all ran forward to meet her.

"He's going off!" was the almost breathless reply.

"Through this surf? Impossible!" exclaimed Storton.

But, possible or impossible, it was true, and in another minute they saw the young boatman and his frail-looking bark making steady way through a raging surf that would have destroyed any product of more skilful and dainty workmanship.

"Try to remember in which direction he goes," said Rosa, as they stopped to watch his wonderful progress till he cleared the shoals, "for if we have to leave this island, we had better choose another way."

"Most decidedly, your ladyship. And now for the rifles. Lead on, Miss Pheenie, and if you come across a hot beef-steak and potatoes, or even a bit of cold boiled pork, on the way, please be kind enough to let me know, and call a halt."

"Oh, certainly," laughed Josephine. "But, look here, if you are really so very hungry that you would like anything better than nothing——"

"Which I am," interrupted Ned, so decidedly and emphatically that his companions, in spite of their present anxieties, laughed heartily at his expense.

"All right, laugh away as much as you please, so long as you give me something to eat," said the young philosopher. "I begin to feel almost as great a gnawing in my inside as I did in that horrid hold."

"Well," said Josephine, still rippling over with merriment, "I am very sorry that I can't give you any dinner, but here is some dessert for you, at any rate. And, as it is not as good as it ought to be, I won't charge you anything for it, either. But you would have to pay ever so many shillings for it in England."

So saying, the little girl, who had run on a few yards beyond high-water mark, knelt down beside what Ned at first thought was a most prodigious and forbidding bunch of outlandish thistles.

"I'm not a donkey," he muttered disappointedly. "And if I were, at least if I were a civilised English donkey, I couldn't eat *that*!"

"But you *are* a donkey—a civilised English donkey—and you *can* eat *that*," laughed Pheenie, who had just plucked up the plant from its sandy bed, and now turned the round head of prickly leaves upside down in her hand, and held it towards Bertram.

"Look there, sir, is not that good enough for civilised English donkeys?"

"Why, it's a pineapple!" exclaimed Ned, who had seen pineapples before he left England, although in 1837 this delicious fruit, first seen in England in the days of stern old Oliver Cromwell, was not by a thousand times as common an object as it is now. "Fancy feeding upon pineapples!"

“Yes,” said Rosa, “it sounds very grand, but I’m afraid you won’t find it so very delightful, after all. There are none of them good this season. One of the native women, who is rather kind to my sister and me, told us that the weather has been bad for them, and they have nearly all rotted this year, before they have ripened.”

And so poor Ned found was the case with the present one. At the best of times the foreign fruit is not to be compared to the luscious pines grown in an English hothouse, but Pheenie’s gift was unfortunately neither “sweet, sour, nor good.”

Still the boy and Storton munched it up, peel and all, as they now pushed on for the native village.





CHAPTER XV.

THE EFFECT OF A RIFLE-SHOT, AND TEN MINUTES TO BUILD A HOUSE.

"**A**RE we near the niggers yet?" The four English castaways had been moving along very rapidly, although cautiously, for nearly three quarters of an hour, and bruised, battered, hungry Ned was getting somewhat tired and impatient.

He caught little Pheenie by the hand, and asked again—

"Aren't we near those horrid old niggers yet?"

"Hush-sh," whispered back Josephine. "Hush-sh, we are pretty nearly close to them. But they are not old—only one of them. They are no older than your friend, and some are as young as you. And they are not niggers, neither—not if that means black people."

"What are they, then?"

"You'll see for yourself in a few moments," said the elder sister, stooping as she spoke, and peering through the lower branches of some privet-leaved shrubs, behind which they were all at present gathered.

After a long and eager scrutiny she rose, and turned to Storton and Edward Bertram.

"Come here, both of you," she muttered in a low tone. "But mind you do not stumble up against that dead tree, or

its branches will come crackling down with a noise that will set all the birds on the island screaming, and then woe betide us all."

Miss Bell's warning was not at all unnecessary, for the ground was so covered with a tangled mass of bindweeds of various kinds, that the untravelled Englishmen stumbled at every step.

When they at length reached the point to which they were beckoned, and, stooping, looked through the opportune opening in the shrubs, they could scarcely restrain a startled exclamation.

Within six or seven yards of them lay the nearest of a wild-looking circle of human beings, utterly unlike anything that either of them had ever seen before. Dingy yellow in hue for the most part, one or two were of a dark-brown colour, like the individual they had surprised in the grotto.

All of them, alike, were adorned with the most savage and fantastic-looking of ornaments — long fringes of split bark, strips of something that looked like plaited cloth, necklaces and bracelets of shells, while some looked especially formidable with their hair gathered upon their heads and bound round and round with gleaming rows of sharks' teeth. The sleepers' own black teeth looked awful enough when they were visible, here and there, through their parted lips.

"Do they grow with those hideous teeth?" muttered Ned, shuddering with disgust.

"No indeed, their teeth are whiter, if anything, than ours, before they take to chewing the betel nut."

"What's that?"

"Oh! I'll tell you another time. Have you yet discovered where the rifles are?"

"No," answered Storton and Bertram simultaneously. "Are they near here?"

"Why, of course they are. That is why Pheenie led you

to this place. I found out where they were the minute I looked."

Ned stooped down again. It was horrid to have his eyes outdone by a girl's.

Once again he scanned the strange scene before him. The circle consisted of thirty or forty men, lying in various attitudes around the smouldering embers of a fire, on the outer edge of which lay a pile of feathers and cleanly picked birds' bones, scorched and singed by the heat.

Beyond the circle was a group of five cocoa-nut palms, to the centre one of which Ned now discovered a man was fastened, and just beyond them was the little rough village of gipsy-like huts, and some sleeping women and children. But nowhere could Ned see those rifles.

"Are you sure that they are there at all?" he asked at last, sceptically.

"Yes, yes, yes," whispered Josephine, eagerly. "Don't you see that very dirty, horrible-looking yellow man, with the great tuft of green and red feathers for a topknot, and the big, slashed humps on his shoulders?"

"I should think so, indeed. I wish I didn't. But the sight of him is a good cure for hunger, anyway."

A moment later Ned straightened himself, and faced round upon the others.

"I see them now. Storton, I say, these girls have cut our work out for us pretty well, I must say. The rifles are lying under that chap's arm—absolutely under it! And we are two to about forty."

"Well," murmured Pheenie, "you know I told you that you would want some courage to get them. These savages must have evidently, some time or other, seen them used, for they always take the greatest care not to let us get them away from them. But I thought—I thought—perhaps if we were men, we should be brave enough to try to recover them now."

"And we, who are men, will be brave enough to try," said Storton, resolutely. Cowardice had never been one of his faults.

"Of course we will," added Ned; "but we must look out for the chance of getting more pricks than if we were picking blackberries. I wonder who's got his arm over the powder and shot bags, by-the-bye."

"I have," said Pheenie, with a low laugh. "I managed to steal back father's flasks out of one of the huts before I ran off to find Rosie. They are in my pockets. And see, every one of the men is asleep."

"Yes," said Storton; "and the less time we waste now the better, lest any of them should wake."

While he spoke, he gathered a handful of leaves and soft twigs, and, laying them across the centre of his handkerchief, proceeded to fold the handkerchief smoothly, cornerwise fashion, over them till he had a sort of little pad, or cushion, with two long ends on either side.

"What is that for?" asked Rosa. "Have you got stung? Is it a poultice?"

"Yes! A poultice for that yellow fellow's mouth. And now will you show us how to get at him?"

A minute later, the little unarmed, defenceless party took their last step out from the shelter of the bushes. There was no need for any of them to warn the others to silence now. The group of savages conveyed the impression of people sleeping with one eye open even in their intoxicated slumbers, and innumerable murderous-looking weapons lay ready for immediate use in the shape of shark-fin spears, clubs, bows and arrows, and pieces of sharply-pointed bamboo, which looked quite capable of inflicting a very ugly wound if thrown by practised hands.

"I'll tell you what," muttered Ned, bending forward close to the girls' ears, "you two had better hurry round at once, and

help each other to unfasten your father. Don't both try at the same knot. But whichever is the cleverer, set to work on the hands, and you'll do better for all of us."

"All right," nodded back Rosa.

Thus answering, she took her sister's hand, and the two ran back into the bushes again, lest one of the women, or anyone else, should discover and frustrate their purpose. Secure from detection, they pushed their way through all the obstacles in their path, with desperate energy, until they were opposite the palm grove, when they darted out of concealment, and, for the first time for fourteen days, stood beside their father.

The joy of their parent was immense at being once more able to speak to his children. But even joy was lost sight of to some degree in curiosity. And no wonder. For Mr. Bell knew nothing of the ship full of his countrymen which the recent storm had cast up upon the neighbouring reef of rocks, nor of Storton's and Bertram's perilous bathe, and almost miraculous preservation. Naturally, then, it was rather surprising to him to see two English-looking, English-clothed human beings suddenly appear within a few yards of him.

"Have those two white men dropped down from the clouds in the hailstorm, Pheenie?" asked her father, pointing to our two friends, who had now just succeeded in creeping up behind the guardian of the coveted rifles, and were pausing to consider their next move.

Pheenie held her breath. She was too absorbed in watching to answer.

Another moment, and Storton had bent down low over the sleeper, and, with the swiftness of a thought almost, his ready-made gag was in the sleeper's mouth, and tied tightly at the back of his head, while at the same instant Ned lifted up the native's arm, snatched the guns from under it, and fled to the cocoa-nut trees, followed by his companion.

"The flasks!" he gasped as he drew near, "quick, the flasks, they are not loaded. They are all rousing. They'll be upon us in a moment."

Ned seized the flasks of powder and shot from Pheenie's outstretched hands, but he gave her no thanks for her promptitude, for at the same time his eyes fell upon the bands that still bound the gentleman to the palms. Not a single effort had been made to undo them.

"Just like girls!" he exclaimed, with some pardonable anger. "They must always look after everybody's business but their own."

"Ha! look there! In the name of goodness get your father free instantly."

That was, indeed, a breathless time of deadly peril for those half-dozen white people. The intoxication produced by the fermented milk of the cocoa-nut is seldom very heavy, and the violent actions of the gagged and furious chief had effectually aroused most of his followers.

Leaping to their feet with their weapons in their hands, the savages looked about in every direction for the cause of the disturbance. At the moment when Ned had glanced round back at them they had just discovered the group under the palm-trees, and with a wild, animal-like chorus of savage yells, the whole forty infuriated fellows had dashed forward, bent on the immediate massacre of their trembling white brethren.

Ned handed one of the loaded rifles to Storton, pressed his back against a tree-trunk, looked at poor little Pheenie, and set his teeth hard.

"Fire, my lad," said a calm voice beside him. "Now—at their legs."

The fierce breath of the savages was almost on their cheeks.

Crack, crack went the rifles.

A shriek, a yell—ah! what a change in the state of affairs.

Ned could not restrain one burst of laughter even in that supreme moment of dread.

Helter-skelter over the ground, away from the palm-trees, were going thirty-eight pairs of yellow legs, top-knots dancing, fringes flying, necklaces jingling, and castaway weapons marking the course of flight. Even trembling little Pheenie uttered a quivering giggle at the ridiculous sight, as she pulled and tugged at the cords of cocoa-nut fibre with which her father was fastened to the tree, far more securely than ever any visitor to Messrs. Maskelyne and Cook's exhibition managed to tie up one of those clever magicians.

Half-a-dozen yards away from them were two more pairs of yellow legs. The owner of one pair lay on the ground perfectly motionless, imitating some of the beetle tribe and shamming dead. The owner of the other pair was sitting up, and eyeing two little streams of blood flowing from his wounded limbs very disconsolately, and keeping up a pathetic little howl over them—a sort of low, continuous “wow-wow-wow,” something after the nature of a melancholy dog's soliloquy.

“You aren't very bad, you know, you big coward,” said Edward at last, in indignant remonstrance, and advancing a few steps towards him as he spoke. “That charge wasn't much worse than if I'd given you a shake of the pepper-pot.”

“Wow-wow-wow,” still howled Ned's yellow antagonist.

“Oh! bother your ‘wow-wow-wow,’ ” exclaimed Ned. “I wish we'd had you at school for a month, we'd have soon taught you to ‘wow-wow-wow’ for nothing, I can tell you.”

“Never mind him, my lad,” called Mr. Frank Bell, the girls' father, who was now free, but found himself as utterly unable to use a rifle as before, the tight bandages and exposure having swollen his arms and made them almost helpless; so that the defence of the party still rested with Stortont and Bertram.

“You had better load your rifles again,” said Mr. Frank. “I know something of savage nature. It yields to alarm very

easily at the first outset, but courage comes back with time and reflection. And they won't go off without their women and children, I feel certain."

He had scarcely spoken when an arrow came whistling through the air from the bushes to their right, and passed through Ned's rumped locks.

"That was a near shave!" exclaimed Storton.

"Ay, indeed, it was pretty nearly being my turn to cry 'wow-wow-wow,'" replied Bertram, as he raised the rifle to his shoulder, and fired again in the direction from which the arrow had come.

Sounds of scuffling, trampling of brushwood, calls and yells that followed that shot proved, to the fresh alarm of the English group, that their enemies had already pretty well surrounded them on all sides, and at the same time were themselves almost safe from the rifles. What was to be done now?

A perfect cloud of arrows came tumbling about their ears, happily wounding no one as yet, but the next shower might, and perhaps they were poisoned.

"If only we were in one of the huts," sobbed Josephine.

"Why, of course. That's the very thing. You've hit the right nail on the head," exclaimed Ned, turning about, and measuring the distance between the huts and their present position with his eye.

"Come, then, let's have a race for it," he added, clasping Pheenie's hand.

"But there are women in all of them, and they look awfully spiteful."

"That's true," answered Ned. "But women aren't poisoned arrows, and I'll soon settle them, you see if I don't. Now, are we all ready? Who'll win?"

So saying, the high-spirited English boy tightened his grasp of the little girl's hand, drew in a deep breath, and flew past

the palm grove, followed by the others, just in time to avoid a second flight of arrows, that found no more sensitive marks for their force, happily, than tree-trunks and the ground.

Arriving in front of one of those ramshackle huts, that absurd Ned acted much as he might have done before the door of the lodge at Errington. He had been in so many dangers and difficulties lately that he had begun to look upon them as the natural state of things, and to think lightly of them accordingly.

While still breathless with his race, he made a low bow to the sullen and scared-looking woman standing at the entrance. Then, dropping Pheenie's hand, he put up both his own to his mouth, suddenly ducked his face forward to within an inch of the woman's, uttered a tremendous "Whoop," and while she rushed frantically away, followed by all her companions, to tell the men of her tribe that they were fighting against a demon, and not against helpless men like the one tied to the tree, Ned and all the rest of his party hastily took possession of her home.

"And I must say I can't say much for the place," remarked Ned, looking round the hovel critically. "I've heard of Irish cabins, but they must be palaces to this."

"Never mind," said Mr. Bell; "I am sure we ought to admire it, for I expect it means life, instead of death, to us."

"Yes, sir—only really—don't you think that no house ought to be built without a well-stocked larder?"

The Bells and Storton all laughed. They could afford to laugh now, for, rough as their shelter was, it was a shelter from the Indians' weapons, so long as the assailants kept at a distance, and, if they came near, then the rifles could come into use again.

Before the laugh had subsided, however, Rosa suddenly stooped down, and when she rose again, she held a little bundle of something up to her hungry companions, saying, with a smile—

"There, you see this house has a larder after all. Wait a moment. I have Father's knife in my pocket, and as Pheenie gave you your dessert, now I will give you your dinner."

"If my dinner is to come out of that dirty little lump of stuff, I'd rather go on starving, thank you," said Ned, making a grimace of disgust.

"Ah, you don't know what you are talking about," said Josephine, with a calm superiority, while she watched her sister turn the despised "lump of stuff" over in her hand, and then begin to make a neat, careful slit down the centre, like a scientific cook who had learnt at a cooking-kitchen, only that there were not such places in 1837; people learnt cooking in those days in their own homes, and not so badly either, judging by my mother, and other dames of my acquaintance of her standing. Ned began to be rather interested.

"Hallo! The lump's got wings!"

"Why, of course it has. Most birds have got wings, haven't they?" asked Rosa, laughing, as she proceeded to turn off the burnt feathers and outer skin of a plump, well-cooked parrot, holding it tidily by the wings as she did so. Then she cut off two dainty slices of the breast, and looked up with mock gravity at poor Ned, whose mouth began to water with longing for the tempting feast, while she tantalised him with her mischievous deliberation.

"I am so sorry, Mr. Ned, that I haven't anything fit to offer you, only this poor little lump of stuff."

"Ah! well, since you haven't, I suppose a fellow must put up with that. Let's taste, and see if it's eatable, cooked in its feathers in that outlandish fashion."

Ned was not going to humble himself too much to a girl; but, like a girl, Rosa forgave him his stubbornness, and pitied his hungry condition, and presented him with the two slices. And then she continued to feed him and Storton until there was little left beside the outside covering and the bones.

"Girls are some good in the world after all," said Ned generously. "I should never have dreamt of searching for anything inside that horrid-looking muddle."

"And if you had," added Rosa, "you would have hacked at it so, that half of it would have been wasted."

"Meantime," said Mr. Bell, breaking in upon this dialogue that went to prove that boys and girls have a tolerably poor opinion of each other as a class—"meantime, what do you suppose this long silence of our yellow brethren outside signifies?"

"That is the very thing that I have just begun to wonder," said Storton. "And if you all like, I'll volunteer to go out and reconnoitre."

"I think it will be still wiser if we remain all together now that night is coming on," said Mr. Bell. "If these natives are anything like those of Australia in their habits and superstitions, they will not attempt to move about or molest us during the hours of darkness, when they believe that the spirit of evil is taking his walks abroad, and is ready to pounce upon any unlucky wretch who is stirring, and inflict all manner of injuries upon him."

"Well, on second thoughts I agree with you," said Storton. "But if we are to stay here, cannot we make the place a little more comfortable, and also a safer stronghold?"

No sooner said than done, or rather begun. Ned's meal had given him a whole new stock of fresh energy, and he was all eagerness for some fresh employment. This suggestion was the very thing. Unfortunately, Ned had such a small amount of admiration for his present refuge, that his first ideas of improvement took the form of destruction, and he had wrenched up pretty nearly half of the native woman's house before his companions could stop his wholesale demolition.

As some of you may be sceptical as to the strength of anyone

but Samson being equal to pulling a house about one's ears in the space of a minute, it may, perhaps, be as well to describe the building which Edward Bertram treated with such a ruthless want of ceremony. At a distance of about eight feet apart, two rows of bamboo poles, three in a row, were stuck to no very great depth into the ground. These poles were drawn nearly together at the top, a bit of rough cocoa-nut matting formed the roof, and a back wall was built up of bark and twigs. The front was open, and the two sides were certainly not to be called closed! Ned, with some dim notion of ready-made tents, or bricks and mortar, exerted his strength on this luckless abode, by dragging up three poles on one side, and jerking down the loose roof upon his companions' heads.

"What in the world have you done that for?" exclaimed Mr. Bell, while everyone else awaited the answer, aghast with dismay and surprise.

"Why, you said we'd make a better place," stammered Ned, beginning to feel conscious that he had done something not so remarkably fine as he had intended, and heartily wishing that the prostrate bamboos would rear themselves up and stick themselves back in a hurry in their old places.

Rosa took pity on his discomfiture.

"Never mind," she said, beginning to raise up one of the poles again; "there's really a very small amount of damage done, and I don't wonder that you think little of such a hut as this. You see, we have lived several years in Australia, and have grown accustomed to thinking that people have got really almost a nice home if they have got two sticks tied together, and a bit of bark against it to keep the worst of the wind off them. Anything makes a home in these parts of the world."

"So it seems," muttered Ned, "if you call such a place as this one."

"Ah, well, if we are only left at peace we will make this quite an ornamental cottage perhaps, to please you," said Mr. Bell, laughing; "and meantime you may indulge your love of destruction by pulling down our next-door neighbour, and bringing its poles here to set in between these."

"All right."

"But be——"

Ned ran out without waiting to hear the end of Mr. Frank's exclamation, and in less than thirty seconds he tore back again with the end of a pole in one hand and a trailing mass dragging after it.

"There's—there's one of the jabbering yellow beggars there," he gasped, dropping the pole, and for once in his life fairly showing the white feather.

"Where? where? where?" exclaimed all the Bells, crowding round him, with faces once more growing pale with anxiety. "Where is he?"

"There," said Ned, pointing a quivering finger at the mass of poles and cords and matting lying before the entrance of their own harbour of refuge.

"Nonsense," said Mr. Bell, with a short laugh of relief. "My lad, you are dreaming. These fellows have a marvellous faculty for hiding themselves, I admit; but it is perfectly ridiculous to suppose that any human being is concealed in that. If there had been, do you suppose that he would have let you drag him along at your heels in this fashion?"

"I believe he has, then," declared Ned positively. "The moment I wrenched up the poles, he started up from somewhere and began to scream at me; and then, as I rushed off here, I saw him fling his arms round his tumbling house and come away with it."

"Well, at any rate, if your tale is true," said Mr. Frank, doubtfully, "he's quiet enough now, and I should think he's smothered or killed, poor wretch. Anyway, he will only be

one to four; so I think we may as well disentangle him from the ruins of his home."

"Just what I was thinking," said Storton, going out as he spoke, and stooping down over the straggling *débris*. The next instant he jumped back with an ill-suppressed scream.

"He bites!"

"Ah!" said Ned, with grim triumph; "now perhaps you'll believe me."

This remark was followed by a great scuffling amongst the prostrate mass, and in a few moments, while all eyes were upon it, and Ned held a rifle in readiness, out sprang the dreaded "jabbering yellow beggar."

"Jabbering," indeed, fast enough, but neither yellow nor a beggar. And Rosa and her little sister suddenly broke out into perfect shrieks and fits of laughter.

"Oh! Mr. Edward," laughed Josephine, dancing a miniature war-dance round him in her delight, "fancy being frightened at that; fancy calling that poor little brown monkey a jabbering—ah, ah, ah! oh, dear!—a jab—jabbering—yellow beggar! Oh, dear me!"

"There, my little daughter, that will do," said Mr. Frank, biting his lips to keep in his own laughter. For Mr. Edward Bertram was beginning to look rather cross. Like many another good-tempered, honest-hearted individual, he detested being laughed at—"especially," he would have added himself, "by girls."

"Now, good people, let us set to work about building instantly, 'with a long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull all together,' to adopt the sailors' phrase, for it will be pitch dark in another ten minutes, and then we can do nothing."

Mr. Bell tried to set the example of acting up to his own advice, but it was almost immediately evident that he must content himself with giving directions to the others. His own arms could not be made to work.

Having taken a keen look round, and assured themselves that they had a clear space of twenty yards, at any rate, about them free of enemies, "except, perhaps, monkey enemies," as Rosa mischievously whispered, Mr. Bell decided that the next hut on the left hand, which was fortunately only a couple of yards distant, almost in a straight line, should help in the formation of a second inner apartment, where the two girls might sleep while the men kept watch alternately in the outer one.

"All right," said Ned, but with not quite such a tone of assurance as he had pronounced those words in before.

"What part of the work shall I do?"

"You shall come with me, and I'll show you. Meantime, Mr. Storton, will you disentangle those poles, and set them up between our right-hand ones? You won't find it very difficult to drive them into the ground just here; and then if you twist that bit of native matting in and out among them, and fasten all together with the cords, we shall have quite a substantial defence against attack on that side. And, girls, you go and move down all the back wall of the next hut, and make it a continuation to ours. Now, Mr. Edward, come along."

Having set the others to work, Mr. Bell took Ned to the farther side of the second hut, and told him to take up those three poles.

"But gently, my lad, and carefully, for I don't want the others to come down also."

"No; I understand what you want done here," answered Ned, "by what you have just set Storton to do. Wait an instant, and you'll see if I don't."

So saying, Ned, with the greatest care, pulled up the three bamboo rods, Mr. Bell supporting each as he did so. Then he gathered them together in his hands, and carried them over to their companion wall, where he planted them in between the others, only making them all slope in the opposite direction

down to the roof of the first hut. By the time his work was so far done, the two girls had already rebuilt the back of the apartment destined for them, and were at liberty to help him in collecting together armsful of leaves, fallen branches, and bits of matting, and other poor little possessions left behind them by the native women, with which to shut up the front door, as Pheenie called it, of their new home.

Storton came to help them, having successfully accomplished his own task, and very soon the two little rooms were hedged round on all sides, with the exception of the one original opening, with a perfect bank of materials that would prove quite impervious to arrows.

"Now, if we only had some pictures and wall-papers, my friend," said Mr. Frank Bell, laughing, "I am sure even you must admit that we have quite an elegant and substantial home."

"Oh, certainly," laughed Edward in assent, "more especially so long as it doesn't rain," looking up and round at the innumerable chinks, through which the darkening sky was still visible.

Pheenie followed his glance, and answered it with a smiling—"Ah, in another minute it will be too dark to see that, and then you will think it is all good roof."

Then Mr. Bell pulled apart, or rather got Ned to pull apart, two of the poles of the inner wall. The young sisters passed through, and soon lay down and fell asleep, while their father kept watch without.

Ned and Storton slept also.





CHAPTER XVI.

STORTON ESCAPES.

"**V**AM so awfully thirsty."

AThat was Ned's waking ejaculation, as he sat up, just as dawn was breaking, and rubbed his eyes, preparatory to staring about him. Certainly his view was rather circumscribed. Some bamboo poles and bits of matting; some bars and spots of brightening sky; one man lying down beside him; one man sitting up, and blotting out with his back the only possibility of a wider prospect.

Ned was just about to shut his eyes again, when a soft murmur of "Poor boy" made him turn his head to the other side, where he saw two merry faces peering at him over the bits of matting that had been laid up against the inner poles.

"You look like wild beasts in a menagerie den," said Ned, shaking off his drowsiness, and jumping up when he found that there was a chance of companionship.

"Isn't it a horrid nuisance that this isn't really an out-and-out desert island?"

"I don't know," answered Pheenie, cautiously. "What do you mean?"

"Why, that if it were, I could let you two girls out, you see, and send you off in different directions to hunt out a river, or a lake, or a pond, or a dairy perhaps, so that I could get something to drink."

The two sisters laughed. "You are very kind, I am sure. Perhaps we would send you out to hunt for us instead."

"And really and truly I do wish we could, too," said Josephine, rather piteously, "for I am certain positive that I am quite as thirsty as ever you can be."

"Poor little thing, I suppose you are. I never thought of that. But, you see, a fellow fancies somehow that you are at home here; you seem to know so much more about the place than I do; and that you can get what you want. I suppose you could, too, could you not, before to-day?"

"Well, we could get plenty of delicious fresh, clear water certainly, and bananas and cocoa-nuts, but of course we only had meat when the natives chose to give us any."

"Well, they may keep all their meat for the present, for all I care," said Ned, "if they would only let me have a bucketful of that delicious clear water. Whereabouts does it lie?"

"Just beyond the palm grove, not ten minutes' run from here. If papa would only let me out, I would soon get you some, and myself too."

"And be clapped up by those yellow thieves, Miss Pheenie. No, no, that would never do. I know a thing worth two of that suggestion; I'll go myself. But what shall I bring you some back in?"

"Those empty cocoa-nut shells. They are what the natives use, except when they use leaf-baskets."

"Leaf-baskets to carry water in!" exclaimed Ned. "No thank you, Miss Rosa, that is too much of a joke. I know better than that."

"But indeed you don't, then, for it's a fact. And they don't spill a drop from them either. I'll make you one some day perhaps, to show you. And you shall drink the water out of it; it gives it such a nice, cool, fresh taste."

"Thank you. Seeing is believing, you know, so I'll believe

when I see ; meantime, as there are no leaves here for you to show your cleverness with, I'll put up with the cocoa-nut shells. Good-bye for the present."

With this farewell, Ned picked up the shells, shouldered one of the rifles, and prepared to set out on his expedition. But he had reckoned without his host.

" Hallo ! " said Mr. Bell, suddenly aroused out of a deep reverie, and catching tight hold of the foot which Ned had just raised in the act of stepping over the pre-occupied doorkeeper. " Hallo, young man, where are you proposing to be off to for a morning ramble ? "

" To the lake beyond the rice-field, for water, father," called out Rosa, before Ned had time to reply, or to decide whether he should tumble down or try to shake his foot free.

To Rosa's secret glee he tumbled down, or rather was knocked down, for Mr. Bell let his foot go so suddenly, and jumped up in such a hurry with a great push against him, that over Ned went on to the top of Storton.

A general explanation followed, with a prohibition to Ned and a scolding to Rosa.

" But he's so dreadfully thirsty, papa," remonstrated Rosa, " and he wished to go."

" He would not have wished to go if you had told him that he was perfectly certain to get stuck full of arrows, like a pincushion, if he did."

" But he was going to take the gun."

" That would have been no good. The natives' eyes are sharper than his, and they would have got first shot. He would have been as dead as a drowned rat before he could use his rifle. No, no, my boy; thirst is a very uncomfortable thing, even in its early stage, but it must get to a far worse pass with you before I shall let you risk your life to satisfy it. At any rate, we will wait for an hour or two to see what happens."

Ned put down the rifle, and dropped back against the wall. Of course Mr. Bell had no real right to control him, but he had no right either, himself, to run foolhardy risks; neither did he wish to.

Every one was silent for a few minutes, then that tender-hearted little Pheenie said quietly—

“Mr. Edward, I’m getting over my thirstiness a little; I hope you are.”

“No, I’m not,” groaned Ned. “I believe I’m rapidly getting on to the mad-dog stage.”

“That ought to be rather a comfort to you,” laughed Rosa; “because then, you know, you will hate the sight of water, instead of liking it.”

“Ah, well, then I’m afraid I have not reached that point quite yet. But, if you please, sir, how long do you propose that we should wait to see what happens; for I think that waiting is quite the horriest thing that anyone can have to do, especially when one’s tongue is beginning to shrivel up like a parched pea.”

“When it does that, my boy,” said Mr. Bell, “you won’t be quite so clever at talking. But—hey!—Hullo!—Stop!—Look there, all of you!”

There was little necessity, however, for the gentleman to tell any one to look, for every one was already looking after Storton, who had, unperceived, gathered up all the cocoa-nut cups and got close to the opening, when, without any warning, he took to his heels and sped away in the direction of the palm grove.

“Poor fellow! Brave fellow!” muttered Mr. Bell.

But Ned turned white and sick with fear. He knew, or had known, Storton for some time, and when he saw that all the cups were gone, the suspicion came to him that cruel spitefulness was the motive of the present act.

“Has he taken all the rifles as well?” he startled his companions by asking sharply.

“What do you mean? He has not taken even one.”

“Then let me take one and go after him.”

“No!” said Mr. Bell firmly, and planting himself in the doorway to give emphasis to his words. “We cannot afford to lose another of our number.”

Again the small party relapsed into silence, Ned thinking to himself that perhaps it was almost impossible for any one who had been very bad to be brought back to goodness by kindness, and the Bells, who of course knew nothing of Storton's antecedents, regarding him in their own minds as a rather foolishly impulsive individual, but a very benevolent hero all the same.

Events proved that the ignorant Bells were right.





CHAPTER XVII.

"A BATTLE FOR A KINGDOM: WHO'LL WIN?"

FOR a quarter of an hour after Storton's flight no one in the hut spoke a word. Ned was reflecting on things in general, and human nature in particular, and all the Bells were thinking, and listening too, with straining ears, for sounds in the distance.

For fifteen minutes they heard nothing to reward their earnest attention. Some screaming parrots flew overhead, pecking at one another, and a brilliant crimson feather fell on the ground before the opening. Then a couple of monkeys came to the village, and scampered after each other, up and down the supports of the hut farthest removed from the inhabited one. And they bit each other's tails, and jabbered and squeaked, and played leap-frog in a way that would have made them a perfect fortune to a showman. But Ned looked at them with unseeing eyes, although he had never seen such a sight before, and none of his companions observed them at all.

At last there came sights and sounds of deeper interest.

The first sight was Storton issuing from the palm grove, and tearing over the ground, back towards the huts, at a pace that might have distanced even an emu.

The first sound was a wild mingling of yells. The second sound was a shriek from Storton—

“The rifles!”

That warning cry had scarcely reached their ears when a second sight met their eyes that seemed to freeze their very life-blood in their veins.

The whole number of the savages on the island—men, women, and children—came pouring out from behind the shrubs, and from between the trunks of the palm-trees, armed with that most awful of all weapons, a flaming fire-brand. Hideous with war-paint and self-inflicted deformities, on they came, leaping, and yelling, and howling, and brandishing their torches with almost fiendish exultation. No more quarter was to be expected from that wild rabble rout than poor Louis XVI. saw, once upon a time, in the eyes of the mob that stopped his flight, and brought him back to Paris to await his turn at the guillotine.

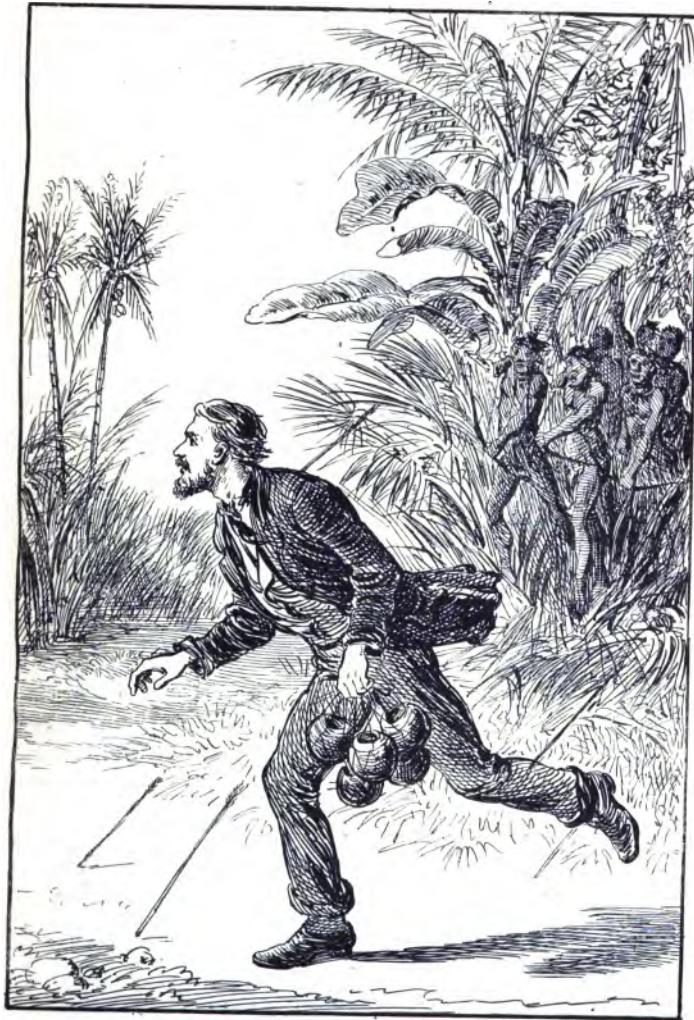
“Come out to us, girls. Quick! quick!”

“Crouch down at the back of the hut, girls!” came the contradictory exclamations to trembling Josephine and Rosa, while, with the strength born of despair, Mr. Bell and Ned seized the rifles, loaded them, and held them in readiness for use. The one Ned had appropriated was already loaded, and he came forward and stood in the entrance with the elder man. Rosa and her sister obeyed the order that was most acceptable to them, and, pushing their own way through their accommodating wall, they came close behind their father, and stood ready to supply powder and shot, or load the rifles as might be convenient.

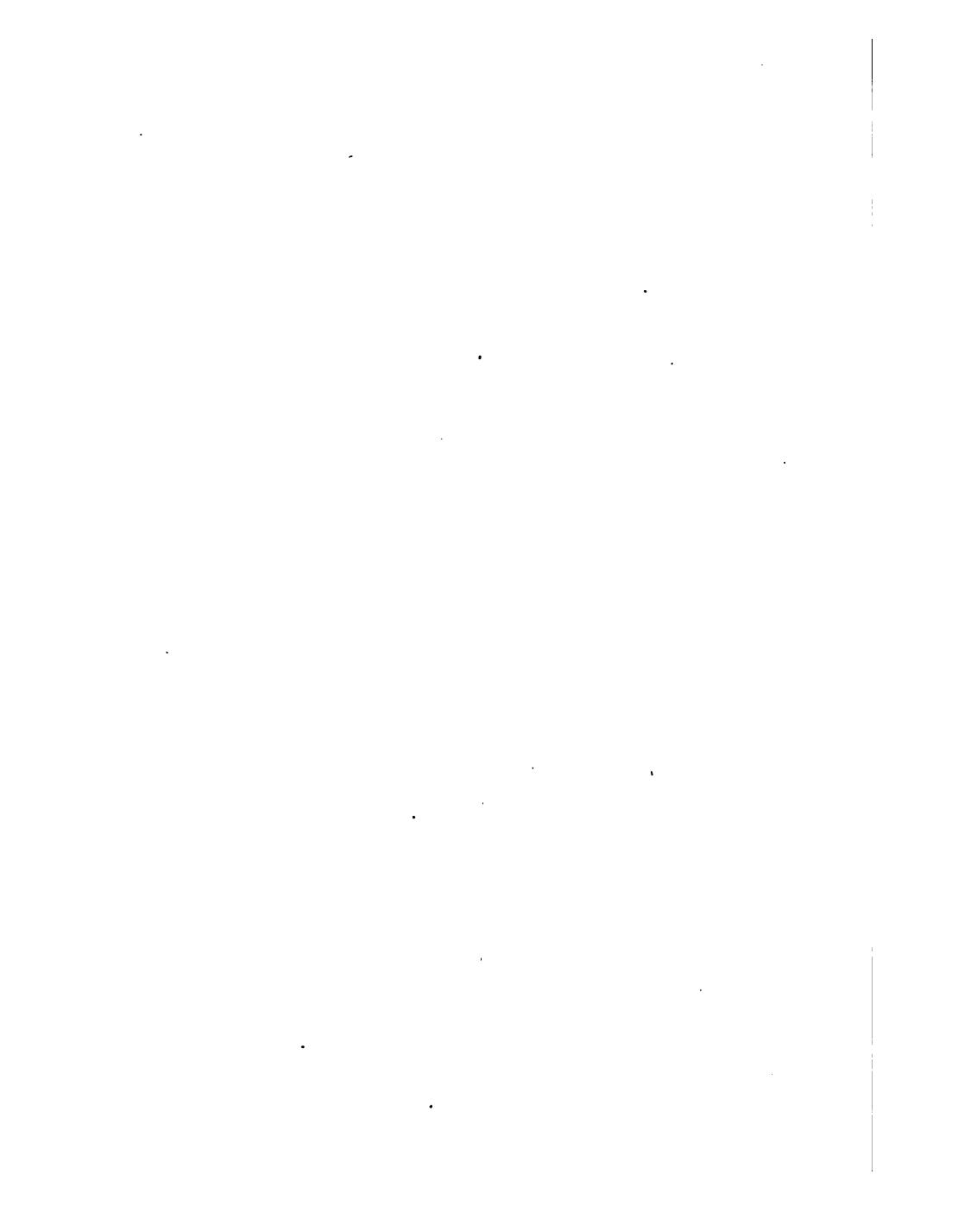
“Let me load your rifle for you again, when you’ve fired it off,” whispered Pheenie to Ned, who turned round and stared at her.

“Why, you can’t, can you?”

“Of course I can,” was the half-indignant answer.



STORTON'S PERIL.



"All right, then; but how queer."

It was not half as queer as Ned thought, though. For Josephine and Rosa had lived four years in the Australian bush, where girls learn to do a good many things that they are not taught in English schoolrooms. Pheenie knew what sort of shot was good for small game, and what should be used for large, as well as Ned himself; and she knew perfectly well, too, that what she had in her flask now would not keep at bay any less ignorant foes than their present adversaries.

"They've got their arrows, too," exclaimed Rosa, gazing with fascinated eyes at the oncoming torrent of besiegers of their weak, wooden refuge.

"Yes," gasped Storton, gaining the hut at that moment, and falling down on the ground inside. "They have indeed got their arrows. I have had three in me. But I got the water first, thank goodness. Here, Bertram, catch hold of this. You don't know how glad I am that I have been able to do something for you. I'd have put up with a dozen arrows for the sake of that."

Ned's face flushed crimson, and tears started into his eyes.

"Give it to the little girl, please, Storton."

There was a big lump in Ned's throat as he turned back to face the enemy. But he must be steady. The natives had paused in their onward rush when they came near enough to see the mouths of those three rifles pointed at them. And they had gathered into one of their favourite circles, and held a consultation of war. But seeing that those dreaded mouths did not speak, nor vomit forth any fire or smoke, they appeared to think that they had grown dumb, and, losing all awe of the silent weapons, they once more broke their circle with acclamations for the expected speedy victory, flung up their arms into the air till their brands blazed out into flame, like greedy tongues longing to lap up that poor little mouthful of

white people, and once more they came raging and yelling onwards.

"Fire!" exclaimed Mr. Bell's deep voice.

Crack, crack, crack went the three rifles. Then dead silence.

Josephine and Rosa began to reload rapidly for their father and Ned; the third weapon Storton quickly enough loaded for himself.

Before the smoke had cleared away, crack—crack—crack went those rifles again, and this time a hubbub, a babel, a perfect pandemonium of screeches, howls, yells, and shouts of rage and defiance followed. The women and children had betaken themselves to panic-stricken flight. Those, at least, who could; but unhappily the shots had wounded two poor women, who now lay rolling on the ground in overwhelming terror and pain, and the men of their tribe were aroused to unusual obstinacy and decision by the sight.

"Poor creatures," muttered Ned.

"Yes," said Mr. Bell. "I'm grieved enough that we have hit the women. But we must fire again. Those fellows mean mischief. They are desperate; and so are we, with more cause. We only hurt them at the worst, but they'll kill us if they can—torture us, too, if they get the chance."

Even as he spoke, their dusky enemies prepared for a new form of attack. Half the number handed over their torches to the other half, who began to move round so as to attack the huts in the rear, while the others seized their bows, and let fly a shower of their unfeathered bone-tipped arrows against the defenders in the front.

"What are we to do now?" exclaimed Ned, in a tone expressive of a certain amount of despondency.

"Why, cheer up, and hope for the best, to be sure," said Mr. Frank, kindly, and laying his hand for a moment reassuringly on the boy's shoulder. "Remember, my lad, there is One above who sees our straits, and can help us."

"Fire," ordered Mr. Bell, once more. The natives were much nearer now, and the rifles did greater execution. Three men fell, two of them evidently much hurt, and all the rest retreated hastily. Seeing this, Mr. Bell and Ned reloaded with all possible despatch, and sent another volley after the bow and arrow party. That settled the fortunes of the day in that direction. The Indians had had more than enough, poor fellows, of the fire-talkers, and, dragging their wounded along with them, they lost no more time in hurrying away from the field of battle.

"That's the way to the shore," exclaimed Rosa, gladly, as she watched the course taken by the fugitives.

"Let us hope, then," said her father, "that they are going to take to their canoes and leave us in peace."

"Look out," said Storton; "you are rejoicing too quickly. We are not out of the wood yet. I am certain I saw a light shining across the crevices at the back of the inner hut."

"Ah, to be sure," cried Ned. "We are forgetting the fire party." As far as regarded saving the huts went, it was too late to remember that division of the enemy now, for at that moment a tremendous crackling was heard, and the next instant, or certainly within the space of a quarter of a minute, the whole structure of dry leaves, twigs, and bamboo canes was in a blaze.

Happily, the flames that drove the English party out of their shelter kept the savages at the same time from approaching them, and prevented their foes from even taking fair aim with their arrows. The only person who got hit was Ned, and he was so excited that at the time he scarcely even knew that he had been wounded. He finished up the engagement finally, and clinched the English victory, by an act of true madcap English recklessness. Tired of shooting, and being shot at to no purpose, he suddenly tossed the rifle he held to Storton, with the remark that no doubt he could make better use of it,

and then, before his purpose could be suspected or hindered, he ran back to the burning huts, seized the uninjured end of a flaring bamboo pole, and, armed with this huge and formidable club, made a sudden curve round the ruins, darted forward, and made a series of swift, promiscuous lunges at the foremost assailants, whose own brands were now reduced to insignificant bits of brittle charcoal.

Rather to guard Ned from the consequences of his own rash act than from any other motive, the Bells and Storton followed his course, and fired their loaded pieces for the last time at the astonished natives. No one was hit. But the yellow men did not care to wait and see whether they might be less fortunate another time. They had had quite enough. They saw their friends taking care of number one, and galloping away in the distance, and they very sensibly made up their minds to follow. Five minutes later, the five English people, standing by the smouldering huts, were the only human beings in sight for the monkeys and the rats to look at.

“But,” said Josephine, continuing her meditations aloud.

“‘But’ what?” asked her father.

“Only, papa, that I know those natives have gone down to the shore, but we don’t know for certain that they have got into their canoes and paddled away to some other island, and I think it would be much more comfortable if we did.”

“I am sure it would,” voted Edward, without any hesitation. The others all voting in the same direction, the rifles were reloaded by way of precaution, and the two girls being put in the middle of the little procession—of which they also had to be the guides—the party set out on their expedition, keeping as much as possible to the open, for fear of an ambush.

To their great thankfulness they reached the shore without any mishap, and saw a whole fleet of canoes departing from the island as rapidly as the paddles could be handled. In fact, a party of young men in one of the canoes tried to get away even

faster than was practicable, when they saw the bold owners of the fire-talkers pursuing them even down to the beach. In their terrified hurry to get farther away, they pulled their canoe up against another one, and over both went together.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Ned, "what an awful nuisance. Now they'll have to swim back here or get drowned, poor wretches."

"No such thing, my boy; don't frighten yourself," laughed Mr. Bell. "That is not the fashion after which things are managed in these parts."

And even while Mr. Bell was speaking, Ned discovered his mistake. A dozen or more natives were darting about in the water for a few seconds, looking as much at home there as the fishes themselves, and then all of a sudden uprose the two canoes sheer out of the water. Both of them got a shake from their owners, were turned over, and deposited right side uppermost in the ocean again. Then the swimmers sprang into them as easily as if they were jumping off a springboard on to a steady platform, and rowed off after their brethren as if nothing had happened, while Ned sent a ringing cheer after them of as hearty admiration as if he and they had parted on the most friendly terms.

"What jolly fellows they are, after all, those yellow skins," he exclaimed. "I and the fellows at Errington would give a thing or two to be able to do that trick."

"Listen to the young man!" cried Mr. Bell with a laugh. "Where is the thing, even one, pray, young gentleman, that you can give away on any account? I am afraid your very seaweedy, torn jacket and trousers are not worth much to anyone but the owner."

Ned laughed too. But the next moment he sank gracefully down on one knee, saying, "Pardon me, the prowess of my arm has won me at least a share in this kingdom. I resign my share to you, King Frank, and henceforth enrol myself as your subject."

"A first-rate notion," said Storton. "Behold another subject in me, your majesty."

"And in us," exclaimed the two young sisters, readily falling into the spirit of the thing. "You shall find us the most delightful and obedient of subjects, King Father."

"Very well," said Mr. Bell with suitable gravity. "I accept the dignity you so unanimously confer upon me, for I suppose that even on a desert island it is as well to have a head, and I am the eldest of our party."

"Yes, of course," said Ned, quickly. "And now, please your majesty, the first use you will make of your new authority will be to order us all to go and get something to drink, won't it?"

A general laugh followed this cool piece of advice to the new sovereign.

"No, Mr. Edward Bertram," laughed Mr. Bell. "My first exercise of power shall be to make you my prime minister by way of prudently taking the bull by the horns. You will make a first-rate officer of state, but I should find you rather a restive subject in a more subordinate position, I fear."

"Oh no, sir. But it will be rather a joke being prime minister on a desert island—the prime minister gives the orders, doesn't he? Miss Rosa Bell, lead up to the lake beyond the rice-fields, and if you see a really good pineapple by the way, or a cocoa-nut, or any more roast pollies, stop and pick them up."

By the time this speech was ended, the Bells and Storton looked like anything but a hapless, helpless, doleful set of castaways. All eyes were dancing with merriment, and Mr. Bell exclaimed—

"Well done, prime minister. Prime minister number one, king number two."

"Oh dear, no," said Ned, demurely. "At least only sometimes, by way of a help."

Then the little procession formed again—Rosa at the head, Ned marching next, King Frank after him, with his younger daughter clinging to his hand, and Storton bringing up the rear.

After a few minutes Storton began to lag behind. He had tried hard to keep up with the pace of the others, but the effort was too painful, and he began to turn faint and sick. He had drawn out the arrows, certainly, with which he had been wounded while dipping up water out of the lake for Edward Bertram; but he became conscious, now that the excitement and peril of the recent battle was at an end, that he had not drawn out everything that had struck him. The fact was, that he had been hit with one of the native arrows that was tipped with a scrap of bone, so ingeniously contrived in its adjustment that it stuck tightly into anything it entered, and readily separated from the weapon to which it had been fixed. Poor Storton found this out now, and every step he took seemed to force the instrument of torture farther into the wound. At last he called out an entreaty to be left behind, and that some of the party would return to him when they had satisfied their thirst.

"I'll stay with you now," said Ned. "You got your injuries for my sake; it's only fair that I should put up with a trifle of inconvenience for you."

"No, no; that's absurd," said Storton. "Run off as fast as you can go, and you'll be back the sooner. It is I who am under obligations to you—obligations that I can never repay; you are under none to me. But stay a moment; you can leave me a loaded rifle, lest any of those yellow men and brethren of ours have chanced to take a fancy to stay behind."

Finding that the wounded man was really bent on being left alone, the rest of the party placed him as comfortably as they could under the circumstances, and then went on, with promises to return speedily with supplies of fruit and water.

“What sort of fruit?” asked Ned, as he walked on again beside Rosa. “I’ve been looking round everywhere, and I can’t make out anything that looks like fruit, at least eatable fruit. There’s never a pear nor an apple anywhere about, I’m sure; not so much even as a cherry tree.”

“Perhaps not. But there’s plenty of beautiful fruit here, all the same. But see! that is the lake, shining through there. You had better run on. You cannot miss your way now.”

Ned needed no second bidding. He bounded away with a cry of joy.





CHAPTER XVIII.

A COCOA-NUT BATTLE—MONKEY WINS.

WHEN Ned at last really stood upon the margin of that exquisite little island lake, boy as he was, and, still more, thirsty boy, he paused for some minutes before stooping down to drink. He was literally startled into admiration for the beautiful scene that burst upon his view.

"We must have stumbled upon the land of the fairies," he sighed at length, as the others came up to him, and interrupted his meditations.

"And this is still winter here," said Mr. Bell. "What would you think of it, I wonder, if you saw it in all the glories of early summer?"

"That it was a great deal too hot, I expect," replied Ned, as thirst once more conquered poetry; and he flung himself down on the green bank, and put his parched mouth into the clear, sweet water.

"I say, come, that's enough," exclaimed Mr. Bell a minute later, and he took his prime minister by the heels, and pulled him up from the lake. "We shall have the fate of the vain bull-frog befalling you, if you drink any more. And I cannot allow the water-supply of my kingdom to be exhausted at this rate, either."

"All right, your majesty," said Ned, laughing; "I don't mind obeying you just now, for I've had enough for the present. But, may it please your majesty, it seems to me that you're uncommonly fond of taking fellows by the heel—I'd much rather, if you don't mind, that you would take me by the hand."

"Ah then, I suppose you would. Well, I will, next time—if it comes handiest. And now, what is to be our next proceeding?"

"Go back to poor old Storton, and then look out for some breakfast, I should say," remarked Ned with a tone of calm decision.

Josephine clapped her hands with amusement.

"I was certain that you would say that," she cried. "I cannot think how it is, boys always seem to be wanting something to eat."

"And girls don't seem, but they are," retorted Ned. "I'll be bound, Miss Pheenie, that you wouldn't hang back if I offered to take you into a tuck-shop this minute."

"A tuck-shop! What's that? I expect I should," answered Pheenie. "We don't have shops with such ugly names as that in the Bush."

"Nor any others either, according to Mr. Edward's notions of shops," said her father, smiling. "But come, our poor wounded man will be thinking that we have forgotten him. Besides, you had better hurry up, for my eyes have found your breakfast for you yonder, while you have been squabbling."

"Squabbling!" repeated Ned indignantly. "We haven't been squabbling. I think Pheenie is a jolly little thing. But of course she doesn't understand anything about boys; girls never do."

"Certainly not; how should they? poor little unobservant ignoramuses. Meantime, here's a good meal for you, which I might never have found, if it had not been for Rosa's sharp

eyes helping me. Meat and drink, cup and platter, all in one. I wonder if you know how to get inside it?"

"Yes, of course. Smash it down on the ground, and break the shell. The milk is very likely all dried up in it, and, if not, it's scarcely ever very nice, and worth saving."

"What do you mean?" cried Rosa, with very wide eyes.

"Never mind questioning him, Rosa dear," said her father with a smile. "Mr. Edward is thinking of the cocoa-nuts he has been accustomed to buy at his English 'tuck-shops' and fruit stalls. Give me that pocket-knife of mine that you were so lucky as to save from the natives, and we will soon show our new friend that, if we know nothing about boys, we know something more about cocoa-nuts than he does."

While he spoke, the new-created monarch, with perfect ease, made three incisions in the indentations always to be seen at one end of a cocoa-nut, and which are generally so hard in the English-bought ones that it requires no end of efforts with iron skewers and pen-knives to break through them. Mr. Bell had no trouble with the one now picked up, fresh fallen from its own tree, and, having made three good-sized round holes, he presented the nut to Edward.

"There, young man, just take a pull at that flask of Nature's unaided providing, and then say if the draught was not nice enough to be worth saving."

Ned did as he was bid. He sucked up a very small, cautious sip to begin with. For he knew and believed in the old proverb—"What's one man's meat is another man's poison." And although the Bells thought fresh cocoa-nut milk very nice, he might think it very nasty.

But he didn't.

His second sip was a long and strong one. And then he slowly dropped his hands, with the cocoa-nut clasped tight between them, and murmured—

"How galopscious!"

"What?" shouted those two young sisters. "Whatever *did* you say? We have heard a great many funny words in Australia, but we never heard that one before."

"And it's such a beautiful long one," added Pheenie.

"And means ever so much more than 'delicious,'" said Ned. "But it's no good your learning it up, because it's one of those words which girls mustn't use."

"Oh dear! what a pity," sighed Pheenie, solemnly. "Is it really?"

"Yes," answered Ned, positively. "Just you see if your father doesn't say so too."

"Never mind, Pheenie," said Rosa. "I daresay papa will let us use it now and then, by way of a treat. On our birthdays, perhaps. But do just look up there." And Miss Rosa Bell broke into a low, mischievous-sounding titter.

"Look up where? What am I to look at?"

"Why, don't you see. In that next tree, watching us, is one of Mr. Edward's yellow-skinned, jabbering beggars."

As though in answer to her notice, at that moment the small creature in question swung itself down on to a lower branch to take a nearer inspection of the human group. The scrutiny appeared to be highly unsatisfactory, and, singling out Ned as the special object upon which to fix its bright eyes, it suddenly launched a tremendous, angry harangue at him, jabbering away as hard and fast as ever its tongue and lips could move.

Everyone laughed but the victim, and his face flushed with angry remembrance of yesterday's humiliating panic.

"Take that, you chattering little beast," he cried wrathfully, hurling his cocoa-nut into the tree.

The monkey uttered a scream—not of pain, for Ned's throw had been much too wide to hit it, but of rage—and with almost the quickness of lightning it made a spring forward into the tree immediately over him, and, plucking another nut, showed that two could play at that game, by dashing it down with all

its force on to where Ned's head would have been had not Mr. Bell, happily for him, pulled him back just in time to avoid the heavy missile. Ned stooped and picked it up, but as another and yet another came dashing down, the whole party took to their heels, till they got clear of the cocoa-nut palms.

“‘Discretion is the better part of valour,’ where an infuriated, uncome-atable little brute like that is concerned,” said Mr. Bell, when the party stood still to draw breath once more. “And one was afraid to shoot it for fear of alarming Mr. Storton. Otherwise, it would have made us a good dinner, with a little exercise of Rosa's cooking powers.”

“Gah!” ejaculated Ned, with drawn lips expressive of intense disgust. “You don't mean that you eat *monkey* for dinner?”

“Don't we, though!” cried Mr. Bell. “And I can tell you what, my lad, you'll soon learn better than to turn up your nose at such a dish as that, if we have to stay here long. Why, a nice, tender, young, well-roasted monkey is a dinner fit for a king. In the course of my travels I have often made a meal off one, without being confined to the narrow limits of a desert island.”

“Would you rather have monkey than mutton, then, papa?” asked Rosa.

“Certainly not, madam, that is a very different matter. But where King Frank finds himself compelled to do without mutton, he would much rather have monkey than nothing.”

“And I wouldn't,” said Ned. “So you girls needn't trouble yourselves to cook any of that sort of food for me, I may as well tell you at once. I won't be taster of monkey-dishes to his majesty, that's certain. But, I say——”

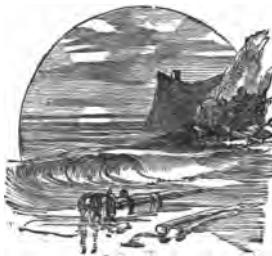
With that exclamation Ned fell back upon those behind him, and pointed, with open mouth, towards the place where they had left Storton.

“Have they come back?” he asked, in a tone of mingled

terror and annoyance. "I wonder where the rest are hiding. Are the rifles loaded?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Bell. "Girls, come here. Bertram, as you are unarmed you had better fall back."

"Umph," muttered Bertram. "I've more than half a mind to rush forward, and learn the worst at once. Poor old Storton! Well, he turned over a new leaf at the last, thank goodness!"





CHAPTER XIX.

“WHAT'S FOR BREAKFAST?” WITH A NEW FASHION FOR CATCHING EELS.

WHEN the Bells and Bertram pursued their way to the lake, leaving Storton in the shelter of some bananas and other thicker-growing plants, his first proceeding was to try and ascertain the nature of his wounds. The one that gave him the greatest amount of pain was, of course, that in which the arrow-point still remained. Unfortunately, this was also the one that it was most difficult to get at, for it was in the calf of his leg, and all his twistings and contortions to try to get the jagged end of bone out only appeared to result in pushing it more firmly in. He could see the wound plainly enough, and touch it too, but his leg was far too swollen and painful to submit willingly to being wrenched round to be operated upon. Besides that, his right arm hurt him a good deal, and the wound in his side made itself felt very much more than was agreeable, from long neglect, and the rubbing of his clothes against it. Altogether, Storton was in a bad case, and at last he dropped himself quickly back full length on the ground, and fainted.

A brilliant scarlet flamingo, astray from its usual haunts, paused for a minute by the prostrate form, with its small head meditatively held on one side. It did not seem to think much

of the sight. It blinked its eyes at it, straightened its head, dropped down its second long stilt, and stalked gravely away, apparently impressed with the opinion that animals of the human tribe were a mistake.

A few minutes later, a singular-looking animal, with very short forelegs and a very long tail, taking a succession of great leaps, came right on the top of the silent figure. Fortunately, it was a small one of its species, or it would have flattened its human landing-stage into a pancake. As it was, it bounded away again, twelve feet at a time, without having done any particular harm. But it had not done any good, either. For the figure was as motionless and silent as before, and showed no signs of rousing. That fact becoming quite evident, there was a slight rustle, just within the edge of the wood, after a short interval.

The rustle stopped. But those closed eyelids remained fast shut, so the rustle began again. It was a very soft rustle, not much louder than a rat would have made creeping through the undergrowth. But it continued up to the outer edge of the wood, and then it finally ceased within three feet of Storton, and two human eyes stared at him, and two human lips said solemnly—

“Wow-wow-wow.”

At least that is exactly, to the very letter, what Ned Bertram would have declared that they said, if he had been there to hear them, and there are very few people in the world clever enough to have contradicted him.

“Wow-wow-wow,” came that solemn remark again.

For, let me tell you, “Wow-wow-wow” can sound very solemn indeed, under certain circumstances, and it was under these certain circumstances that they were pronounced now. There was one dead-looking, white-faced human being lying stretched out on the ground, and near him sat a very cadaverous-looking, hollow-eyed, yellow-skinned human being,

staring at him. The yellow-skinned human being was dressed in draggled feathers, broken shell necklaces, and a fringe of cocoa-nut cords, about a yard in depth, hung round his waist. The bare yellow legs were ghastly with streaks and clots of blood. And even the cocoa-nut fringe was bedabbled on one side.

Over the heads of these two sorely wounded human beings shone a clear blue sky, a soft air breathed over them through the trees, a burnt village of bamboo huts lay to the right of them, and the splash-splash could be heard of the ocean waves, lapping up on the coral-reef two miles distant.

The yellow-skinned human being stared at his white-skinned brother for a long time ; and then his eyes fell upon the rifle which Storton had laid beside him when he began to examine his wounds. At sight of that weapon poor yellow-skin started and trembled, and looked pitifully at his own injuries. Finally, he struggled up on to his knees, bent forward, clasped his hands, and addressed a rapid jumble of sentences to the rifle, of which even Edward Bertram could have only distinguished the tone of supplication.

When the native had finished his prayer to the unknown and horrible demon, the dreadfully powerful guardian of the pale strangers, he was suddenly endowed with a happy inspiration. He would bury his two enemies—put it out of the power of the demon and his charge to do any further harm. This happy thought scarcely occurred to him before he proceeded to put it into execution. His idea of burying was fortunately much the same as that of the robin redbreasts who buried the babes in the wood. He preferred an above-ground burial, and no moving of the bodies.

There were plenty of tropical leaves close at hand, and twigs and weeds. It did not take two minutes to smother up Storton and the rifle out of sight. And then the tired-out, maimed native sat down again, chose the twisted, uneven trunk

of a screw-palm by way of a comfortable leaning cushion, and gave himself up to the contemplation of his handiwork with a quiet grin of satisfaction. In a minute or two his eyes closed, and he fell asleep. Then Edward Bertram, marching on in front of his companions, came within sight of the strange scene, as has been already mentioned, and of course, as he had not been present at the very light and airy and poetical burial of his fellow-emigrant, and now only saw a yellow-skinned native close to where his white countryman ought to be, he was considerably grieved and alarmed.

King Frank called a halt. He, too, began to fear that his reign was to be a short one, and that the natives, getting the better of their fright, had come back to renew a contest in which they were almost certain to be successful if they persisted long enough.

“The question is,” said Mr. Bell, “whether it’s wisest to leave the girls here in the open while we advance, or to take them with us.”

“Take them with you,” said Pheenie, slipping her hand coaxingly into her father’s. “Besides, I’ve still got all the powder-flasks.”

“Yes, but we will take them, even if we leave you.”

“By-the-bye,” said Ned, “suppose we all stay here together in the open, just for the present, and send a shot over in that direction before we go any further. It would very likely produce some effect, and show us better what to do.”

“Not at all a bad suggestion,” cried Mr. Bell; “nothing could be better.” And losing no time in its execution, he forthwith raised his rifle to his shoulder and fired.

Ned’s expectations were realised. The shot did produce an effect, and a very extraordinary one; at least so those anxious lookers-on considered; but it was not at all the kind of effect that had been anticipated.

The four English people were gazing forward with anxious

eyes to see a second fierce onslaught of enemies break out from behind the bushes upon them. Instead of that, they saw a sudden upheaval of a mass of leaves, with a man very like Storton starting up in the midst of them, while one poor unarmed native, having sprung to his feet and stared at the unexpected vision for a moment, was now flying directly towards them in his blind terror, as though all the queer demons of his imagination were in visible shape pursuing him.

“This *is* a rummy go,” ejaculated Ned, as he ran forward and caught the native in his arms, just as the poor creature staggered and was falling to the ground, exhausted with illness and terror.

“‘A rummy go,’” murmured Miss Rosa, storing up a second new expression for future use, as they all hurried forward to Storton, dragging the trembling prisoner along with them.

“What in the world made you cover yourself up like that, Storton? Were you cold?” shouted Ned, as soon as he was near enough to make himself heard. “We thought you had disappeared—been done away with altogether—and lo and behold! you exhibit yourself as a Jack-in-the-Green, and months after May-day. The funniest thing to do I ever heard of.”

“It would be, certainly, if I’d done it. But I’ve no more notion than yourself how I came by my green covering.”

“The fact of the matter is, that you have been buried,” said Mr. Bell, who had been making use of his slight knowledge of the native language to put a few rapid questions to the captive. “And it’s lucky for you,” continued that gentleman, “that you were buried before you were killed. It is not the usual fashion in these parts, I believe. However, neither your burial nor your rest appear to have agreed with you. I am a doctor by profession. Suppose you let me examine your wounds, while the rest of them gather fruit for our breakfast.”

Mr. Bell had already begun, as he spoke, to busy himself

with the other sufferer, and thus taking upon himself the charge of the two wounded men, he dismissed the others to look for the wherewithal to furnish a morning meal, of which they all began to be sorely in need.

"And mind you lay the table neatly, Pheenie," said her father.

"Oh, of course she will," answered Rosa, laughing. "And pray, papa, what orders have you for me?"

"Why, that you light a fire, and cook us something very appetising immediately."

"The very thing," cried Ned.

"Oh, of course you—"

"Now, if you please, Miss Rosa, don't be in such a hurry. What I was going to say was, that it would be the very thing for you to make a fire, and meantime I believe I can find you something to cook at it."

"A monkey?"

"No, nor a parrot either, just now."

With that short answer Ned ran off to avoid further questions, only turning once to cry out—

"Be quick with that fire."

"What is he going to get, I wonder?" asked the girls.

"Nothing," said Mr. Bell, laughing. "He thinks, no doubt, that he is going to bring you back a fine dish of fish, but they are not so easily caught as he supposes."

"Then you don't think that I need try to light a fire."

"No, certainly not. Much better use your energies in trying to find some ripe bananas. We cannot well have anything more wholesome and nourishing. And we shall not starve, if we have nothing else for the next few days to come."

"I am tired of bananas," muttered Rose.

"And so am I," echoed her sister. "And it would have been good fun trying to light a fire as the Indians did, by rubbing one stick inside the hole of another. I expect it's quite easy."

Meantime Edward Bertram hastened on to fulfil his half-made promise, which was not by any means such a wild or ignorant one as Mr. Bell imagined. On coming up from the sea-shore an hour ago, Ned had noticed to the left hand the gleam of a diminutive, muddy little river, and as he hastened on with his companions to the clear, pure lake, he had repeated, half-unconsciously, that specially elegant imitation Latin rhyme—

“ In mud eels is,
In clay none is,
In fir tar is,
In oak none is.’

And now, as hunger and ambition united to make him wish for distinction in the commissariat department, his eager feet kept time to a somewhat monotonous song, whose whole burden was—“ In mud eels is, in mud eels is.”

Arrived at his goal, Ned lost no time in descending the slippery bank a foot or so below the sluggish water; then, by the aid of an old oyster shell he had picked up on his way, he began scooping out the mud, carefully and watchfully, but there was no undue deliberation in his movements.

For some minutes his trouble met with no reward, and the repetition of his interesting little statement, “ In mud eels is,” began to have a questioning accent in its utterance. All of a sudden it changed again to a jubilant shout of decisive exultation—“ In mud eels is!”

And in a moment Ned had dropped down on his knees in the slush, and was tugging away with both hands at two slippery prizes. He obtained a couple more in the same unfishermanlike way, and then he clambered back to dry ground, with the audible remark—

“ Of course girls don’t eat much, so there’ll be one apiece for us men, and Darkie must fish for himself, unless he eats grubs, as Rosa says they do in Australia.”

Having thus settled matters quite to his own satisfaction, Ned resumed his usefully instructive song, and proceeded to make the best of his way back to the temporary encampment, where the two girls had completed their preparations for breakfast, and were impatiently awaiting his return.

Pheenie's part of the arrangements was very tasteful. A couple of giant palm leaves that had formed part of Storton's covering now served for table and table-cloth, while bunches of such blossoms as she could find at that season, and leaves, were grouped here and there upon them to conceal other deficiencies ; at least to try to conceal them, for they did not have the smallest effect in hiding the poverty of the provisions from Ned's sharp eyes. While the three Bells exclaimed joyfully at the sight of his eels, he groaned dolefully at the other contributions for the picnic.

"It's bad enough," he groaned, "your not getting the fire lighted. But who in the world, do you suppose, is going to eat those leathery-looking things you've got spread out there ? Leather at the bottom of the table," he continued, looking dolefully enough at the bunches of bananas, "and leather at the top ; leather in the middle, and leather at the two sides. It's worse than the French commander's old boot, that was served up with some sauces."

"But these fruits are not old boots," said Mr. Bell, laughing, "and they have nothing leathery about them but their outsides. They are so good and nutritious that I should not wonder if the doctors take to ordering them, some day, as wholesome, light diet."

"But I like a heavy one," muttered Ned, "so that it isn't leather. Beefsteaks, and lots of potatoes, and Yorkshire pudding."

"You'll have Rosa laughing at you again," whispered Josephine, warningly.

"Let her. Just look at her rubbing those two sticks

together to get them to light. Why, they are as green as if she had just picked them off a growing tree! Come along, and let you and me see if we can't beat her at that work."

"Meantime," said Mr. Bell, "hand over your eels to me, and I will get them ready, while you get the fire ready between you."

"If they can," corrected Storton. "But from the way my yellow friend yonder is grinning at them all, I don't think he expects much from their attempts."

In fact, poor Wow-wow found the stupidity of the white faces too great to be borne. And partly from gratitude to his surgeon, and partly from contempt for the awkward ignoramuses, he took the fire manufacture into his own hands. Gathering together some withered leaves and twigs, which the sun and wind had already dried after yesterday's storm, the native next searched about for two bits of dry, hard wood, which he was not long in finding. One of the pieces had been bored right through by some insect. One end of the other piece he scraped down to a point with a sharpened shell, carried with a number of other articles in a sort of pouch in his belt.

His implements thus prepared, Wow-wow inserted the point of the one stick into the hole in the other, and then, rolling the pointed one rapidly between his hands, he had sparks, smoking leaves, and, finally, fire, almost before the sisters or Edward Bertram had made their sticks feel even warm.

"He's my prisoner though, after all, you know," remarked Edward, as though the fact of having caught the wounded man in his arms gave him some undeniable claim to praise for the native's cleverness. Mr. Bell took the matter in a different light.

"Very well," he said, "you shall have the prisoner made over to you. Everything good that he does shall be laid to your credit, and, of course, everything bad. And as it is of

almost vital importance to us now to keep him here, you shall have the privilege of watching over him at night."

"That's a part of the prime minister's business always, is it not, papa," asked Rosa, "to look after the prisoners?"

"Then if it is, you shall be prime minister," said Ned, with a pretended yawn. "For I won't. I should be sure to fall asleep on duty. But see. Now we've got the fire, how are we going to cook our fishes? That's a much more interesting matter than politics, or whatever you call prime minister affairs. We can't put them down here in front, because the wind is blowing so that they would be covered with ashes; and if we put them on the top, they will be burnt to nothing."

"Yes. We'll put up some gipsy sticks over the fire. There are some splendid long ones that will just do, over there by the huts."

"And how about the kettle—what's to do for that?"

"Kettle, indeed! Saucepan, you mean. Dear me, what are boys made so ignorant for, I wonder," said Rosa, pityingly.

"To amuse girls, I expect," answered Ned, coolly. "But that cocoa-nut shell is a good thought of yours. A string of them over the flames with our breakfast boiling away in them will be jolly."

"They will be still jollier, in my opinion," said King Frank, "when they are set before us on Pheenie's green table-cloth. It must be getting on towards dinner-time. I shall begin feasting upon one of you if you keep me waiting much longer for some food."

The native youth was apparently beginning to feel as hungry as his foreign companions, for he held out his hands now towards the bananas, and made begging signs for some to be given him. Josephine picked out three or four of the finest "lumps of leather," as Ned called them, and laid them down before the stranger guest, while Ned looked on to see how the brownish-yellow things were to be eaten. He was considerably

surprised when he saw the tough outer skin stripped down all round, laying bare the eatable inside, which looked like a soft, thick piece of pith four or five inches long. The islander ate up the first with such eager relish that Ned began to think he might as well throw aside pride, and begin breakfast with a bit of leather after all, while Rosa was finishing her cookery. But there was something more to see first.

Having eaten one banana in its natural state, Wow-wow peeled the others, slit them in halves, and, going round to the other side of the fire, laid the slices on the glowing wood, where the wind blew it clear and bright, and in a few moments the smell from the sputtering, frying fruit was so good that Ned forthwith gave up his fears of leathery food for once and all, and joined his philosophical prisoner in his meal forthwith.





CHAPTER XX.

KING FRANK LIKES HIS KINGDOM.

OUR hungry friends took an uncommonly short time to eat their breakfast, and "clearing away" was somewhat unnecessary.

"So what's to do next?" asked Ned, as he swallowed his last mouthful of banana, and wiped his sticky fingers somewhat fastidiously upon a leaf.

His act drew quite superfluous attention to his general personal appearance. The heat of the fire, wind, and time combined, had dried his clothes very completely, and the front view of him presented a fine specimen of baked mud. His face was streaked. His hands were grimy, with the exception of the tips, whose very cleanliness made the dirtiness of the rest more visible. Consequently his question, "What's to do next?" was greeted, after a moment's pause, with a general laughing exclamation—

"Go and have a bath, clothes and all."

"Ah!" said Ned, calmly surveying himself for the first time, "that comes of trying a new plan for catching eels. But it will be very agreeable to the feelings of the prime minister to go and have a swim. So, if you please, your majesty, I vote that you and I make our way down to the

sea, while the girls see to keeping up the fire against dinner time, and gathering another supply of bananas, and anything else good that they come across."

"Very well," answered King Frank, smiling. "Your idea is not such a bad one, if the girls don't object to their share of it, and Mr. Storton will keep guard over camp while we are away."

"Oh yes, I know he will," replied Rosa for him quickly, "and attend to the fire too, while Josephine and I get Wow-wow to go into the woods with us, to snare a monkey for Mr. Edward's next meal."

"Gah!" exclaimed Ned once more, as he and Mr. Bell went off for their bathe.

"Find us a bathing-place, while you are there," called Rosa after them.

"And make haste back, to build a house for to-night," called her sister.

"Pheenie's request gives rise to a very grave consideration," said King Frank. "The whole island appears now to be at our disposal. But we know neither its extent nor its capabilities. And it would be pleasant to know both before deciding on the site for our habitation."

"You speak, sir, as if you expected us to be shut up on this island for the rest of our lives," said Ned.

"Well, we might have many a worse fate," answered the new king, as he stood still in the beautiful glade they were now crossing, and looked around him on the exquisite scenes of peaceful beauty that met him on every side, edged in front by a delicate white fringe bordering the sparkling waters of the sea, and with a background of soft swelling blue-toned hills, at the foot of which lay the unseen lake.

"What do you say, my Prime Minister?" asked Mr. Bell, after a short pause. "Does the prospect of having to remain here seem a very doleful one to you?"

"If you please, your majesty, not at all for a time," was the ready answer; "and when we are tired of it, why, we'll just build a boat, and cut it."

"Admirably decided," exclaimed Mr. Bell. "And of course, since you speak so confidently about the boat, you are fully equal to its construction, and when we require it we shall only have to tell you, and leave the care of providing it in your competent hands. You shall have the free use of my pocket-knife by way of tools. The island contains no others, unfortunately."

"Then I wonder how the natives manage to make their canoes, and bows and arrows," remarked Ned, rather shrewdly.

But the explanation of that wonder had to wait for the future, and was gradual in its unfolding. The two companions had reached the shores of the island, which were washed by a sort of narrow salt lake, the bed broken here and there by sharp, rocky projections, which served as stepping-stones or connecting links in fair weather with the reef. During storms, such as that of yesterday, these stepping-stones were completely covered by a high-dashing, fierce surf, which was quite impassable, and at such seasons the only connection between the reef and the island on that side was at one small point, about a quarter of a mile lower down, where the rock formed a natural bridge between the two. It was across this bridge that Rosa had run when she saw the ship, the *Good Bess*, rocking on the reef at its outermost edge, still further down; and it was across this spray-washed, pool-filled bridge that, an hour or so later, she had pulled her sister with her, to the small grotto on the reef, into which Edward Bertram and Storton had so mercifully been washed.

But neither this bridge, nor the grotto, were visible from the point of shore which Mr. Bell and Ned naturally arrived at first, in coming straight down the long and beautiful glade, of nearly three miles in length, which led from the neighbourhood

of the native village down to the sea, or rather to the inner belt of salt water.

Ned prepared to go over the rocks, to get to the open sea, with a rather rueful look at his bare feet and the sharp crags.

"I'll have a try if I can't make myself some shoes out of those leather banana skins before to-morrow," he laughed, as he gave his first leap forward on to the smoothest place he could see.

"All right, Shoemaker and Prime Minister"—the titles sounded capitally together—"but meantime, youngster, you are always in such a mighty hurry about everything. Sharks abound in the waters about here, I believe ; and although the natives escaped being snapped up this morning, we might be less fortunate. All things considered, I think we will bathe inside the reef until we know somewhat more about our surroundings."

"Humph," muttered Ned, and looking half inclined to rebel. But he opportunely remembered a gruesome tale told him by Bill Anderson, of a mate of his who had both his legs chopped off clean and sharp by a shark's teeth in Sydney Harbour. And the operation had been performed so unscientifically, that the poor fellow had died from the effects of it.

This recollection, rather than loyalty, kept Ned to his duty ; and as he happened to alight on the rim of a natural basin of considerable depth and width, he had a very enjoyable bath, although the exercise of his swimming powers was somewhat restricted.

When Mr. Bell returned to dry land, and advised his companion to do the same, Ned suddenly exclaimed—

"Oh ! but how about my clothes ? I haven't washed them yet. And I am sure they are in a worse pickle than I was."

"Very likely," said his companion. "But your jacket and trousers will shake and brush, and I washed your shirt the first thing. I hope it is dry now. Yes," he continued, stooping

to where he had spread it out on the sand, "that is dry enough, as I expected. But where are your socks? did you kick them off as well as your boots when you jumped overboard?"

"No; I took them off when I went in after the eels. I wonder where they are got to."

"Nowhere, I should say, but are lying where you left them. But come, are you ready? Rosa and Josephine will be thinking we are lost, and we have made no search as yet for a safe and sheltered bathing-place for them. I should like to find one near here, if we can."

So saying, Mr. Bell led the way along the shore—not towards the place whence the native fleet had departed that morning, but in the direction of the bridge. And about midway Ned's nimble feet carried him first to the exact thing that was required. The action of the water there had grooved out of the sandy shore a miniature canal, which ran up into a green, leafy wood, and there emptied itself into a small, clear lake, shelving gradually to the centre, where its greatest depth was not more than five feet. The bed was of sparkling white sand, which also formed a narrow border round it of three or four feet in width; while close up to this came groups of tea shrubs, shining-leaved tobacco plants, plantains, palms, and many another beautiful production of the tropics, that only awaited the first sign of summer to burst forth into glorious masses of rich bloom.

"They can't very well get drowned here, unless they try," said Ned, as he knelt down, and gathered some shells gleaming with metallic lustre, just beneath the water.

Their father agreeing with Ned's opinion, it was soon decided that Rosa's behest was fulfilled. It remained now to hasten back to the small encampment, and concert measures for carrying out Pheenie's more important advice.

"My idea is," said Mr. Bell, "that we erect a temporary abode on or near the site of the native village. There is an abundance

of building material close at hand. A fair supply of food is within reach, and fresh water is not far off."

"Added to which," said Ned, "we know our way from there to our bathing-places, and to the eel river. And we don't know our way about anywhere else."

"There is more in that last argument of yours," said Mr. Bell quickly, "than in any of the others that I had just advanced. For, on second thoughts, I begin to think that the position is as unwise and inconvenient, for people in our circumstances, as it would be possible to find on the island. At least three miles from the sea and passing ships, and more than half-a-mile from fresh drinking water."

"Then we had better go somewhere else."

"Decidedly. And so we will, when we know where that somewhere else is. But we may as well take time to make a good choice while we are about it."

"Hullo! they haven't let the fire out, at any rate," shouted Ned joyfully, at this moment coming within sight of a fine mass of smoke and flame blown towards them by the wind. "If they have only been as good about the dinner as the fire, we shall do well."

"Yes, especially as I have brought up a fair contribution to it from the sea," said Mr. Bell, attracting Ned's notice, for the first time, to a large folded leaf he was carrying carefully with both hands.

Ned turned and peered in at the opening of the leaf, and then rushed on to the camp, crying at the top of his voice—

"Clear a hot place for the cockles, Rosa; be quick. Giant cockles."

"Nay then, there's no hurry," exclaimed Mr. Bell, hastening up behind him. "It is little more than two hours since we finished breakfast."

"But if you please, your majesty," said that ever-hungry prime minister, "I think it will be such a good thing to get

dinner over before you set the builders to work. It will save interruption till supper-time."

"Oh, of course," was the laughing assent. "Well, have it your own way. But evidently our companions have not wasted their time while we have been absent. Rosa and Josephine are not beckoning to us in that eager way for nothing."





C H A P T E R . X X I .

LEAF COTTAGE AND A FOLDING-CHAIR.

MR. BELL was quite right. The sisters, with a little help from Storton, who was much easier since his wounds had been washed and the piece of bone extracted, and with a great deal of help from the grateful young native, had prepared a very agreeable surprise for their absent parent and friend.

Josephine had scarcely sent her request after them, as they went off sewards, than Rose turned to her with the exclamation—

“ Suppose we try to build a hut, to astonish them with when they get back?”

Pheenie, thinking this a splendid idea, the two girls proceeded to try and put it into execution without loss of time. Running across the open to the burnt village, they began by seeking out a few poles that had escaped the fire, and, deciding against erecting them on that dreary site, they commenced operations by each carrying one across to the outskirts of the beautiful little wood where they had established their gipsy camp. Then, with some of the sharpened shells they had found near the huts, and with bits of wood, they scooped out two holes about ten feet apart, and began to set up their staves, one on either side of Storton.

"What are you about?" he asked, as he pulled himself forward a little to help them.

"Building a roof over your head," laughed Rosa; "or trying to."

Whether or no their attempts would have been successful is doubtful, if at this stage in the proceedings the native had not guessed what was going forward, and with very unintelligible language, but very intelligible signs, volunteered his valuable services.

Running a little farther into the wood, he soon returned with several long strips of bark, of a tolerably tough, strong nature; and the English folks had not long to wait to see the use of them.

Immediately behind Storton grew half-a-dozen of the soft-stemmed young plantains, about twelve feet high.

These the native drew together in pairs, as near the top as he could reach, with his strips of bark, fastened with pins of wood and tendrils of the trailing plants growing at their feet.

While he was doing this Storton began to perceive his purpose, and, directing the girls to pile up a heap of wood for him, by way of a high step beside each of their staves, he took a third of the poles they had brought across, and, mounting on the wood piles, he bound the two ends firmly to the tops of the side staves. Then Wow-wow, with a grin of approval, pushed towards him his pairs of plantains, one pair being bound to the centre of the cross pole, the other to the two ends where it united with the sides.

The bower-hut thus far advanced, Rosa and Josephine clapped their hands with delight. But there was something more to be done yet to make it answer even to Wow-wow's notion of a home. He looked thoughtful for a minute, and shook his head reproachfully at the ruined village, amidst which lay the burnt remnants of cocoa-nut matting. But his face soon cleared, and, bounding away towards a fan-palm of

middle growth, about thirty or forty feet high, he climbed up the uneven trunk with the agility of a cat, quite regardless of his wounds, and soon stripped off and flung down a couple of the enormous leaves, about twelve feet long, and between nine and ten broad.

"Hurrah!" cried Josephine, as she pounced upon one of them, and began dragging it towards the bower.

"Wah!" shouted the native, with an equal tone of triumph, as he dropped to the ground and seized the other.

When, with the additional aid of Rosa and Storton, these two leaves had been utilised into complete coverings for back, roof, and sides, the rapidly-built dwelling began to look really comfortable, with the fire kept blazing away merrily in front of it, close to which the native flung himself down, and regarded the joint piece of handiwork with grins and chuckles of the greatest complacency.

"Now for some chairs and a table," said Pheenie. And her two English companions laughed. But the young lady soon showed them that she meant what she said.

A diligent turning over of the ruins resulted in the finding of fourteen or fifteen various lengths of bamboo, with which she returned to camp, and Rosa laughed again, remarking, "Why, I don't believe that you've got two pieces of the same length. I'm afraid your chairs won't be comfortable enough to tempt any one to sit on them but yourself."

"Oh, Rosa, now you really are foolish. Don't you know that I can make a long hole for the long pieces, and a short one for the little ones."

Thus reminded of a very plain fact, Rosa quite contentedly turned the laugh against herself, and, beginning to think that her sister's furniture plan was really possible of accomplishment, she once more set to work to help. The four legs of the table were soon set up, and Pheenie fetched a large, shining leaf, which formed a bright top for it, at a very small amount of

trouble, and no expense. It was rather given to turning up at one side, but the young cabinet-maker remedied that defect by laying a couple of bananas down there. The seats gave more anxiety.

“Leaves won’t do to sit on,” murmured Pheenie, in sudden perplexity. “They would split, I suppose. I wonder whether Wow-wow could suggest anything.”

With this hope, Josephine began to make signs to the native, to intimate her wishes. She placed a leaf on the three sticks meant to form the supports of one of her three-legged stools, and, seating herself upon it, suffered herself to fall with it to the ground. She looked dolefully at Wow-wow, and went through the same performance a second, and then a third time; Wow-wow, meantime, staring at her with eyes that grew bigger every moment, until they threatened to swallow up his whole face.





CHAPTER XXII.

“SEASONING” FOR A LIGHT MEAL.

OUR last chapter ended with Josephine Bell's attempt to get the native's aid in making chairs. As she completed her third performance to prove that a leaf is an unreliable chair-seat, Rosa went off into a convulsive giggle. Wow-wow transferred his bewildered gaze to her for a moment. Then his face cleared, his eyes contracted to their natural size, and, to poor Josephine's utter consternation, he burst into a paroxysm of laughter, threw himself back full length on the ground, and rolled over and over in excited glee at the funny little exhibition that had been provided for his amusement.

“There, you see, Rosa, you shouldn't have laughed,” said Josephine; “you have made Wow-wow think it all nonsense.”

“And so—so—so it is—all nonsense,” laughed and stammered Rosa, till she suddenly saw that her disappointed sister was on the point of tears. Then good-nature got the better of amusement, and she set her brains to work to forward the little girl's wishes.

“Look here,” said Storton, holding up something in his hands; “won't this do? It's rough, but may answer your purpose.”

“I should think so;” “Beautifully,” exclaimed both the girls,

as they looked admiringly at a piece of cross-bar work, made of twigs, and bits of split bamboo.

Josephine's face was all smiles again. As for darkie, he much better understood the girls' next intimation, that he might help them to provide another supply of food. The first article he brought was a small snake. He had seen the eels welcomed with delight two hours ago, and accordingly had taken some pains to procure a similar-looking article of diet. He was very surprised when the girls retreated from his offering, shuddering. He turned sulky, sat down as far from the hut as the pleasant influence of the fire extended, cooked his prize for his own benefit, and when he had eaten it, lay down and fell asleep.

"Crosspatch," said Rosa.

"Never mind," said Josephine, who had completed her chairs. "We can do without him." She ran off to the palm grove for the nuts which the furious monkey had been good enough to use as missiles to throw at Ned.

Rosa's contribution to the meal was a bunch of bananas, and a handful of small round seeds she had gathered from a plant close by.

"What is the use of them?" asked Pheenie, with doubtful looks at the little greenish-black balls. "Are they nice?"

"Don't know," replied Rosa, with a mischievous sparkle in her bright eyes. "I thought they looked so like pills that they might console father for not being able to concoct real ones. Perhaps that boy may like a few for miniature marbles."

At that moment "that boy's" shout was heard, and he himself appeared in sight, tall almost as the impudent young lady's own tall father. The girls flew forward to welcome the new arrivals to Leaf Cottage.

"And it does you infinite credit," said Mr. Bell, looking at

the building, and its interior arrangements, with much approval.

"What do you say?" asked Pheenie, turning with some anxiety to Bertram, who stood holding the cockles, of which he had politely relieved the doctor.

"Yes, what do you say?" added Rosa.

"Elegant, but unsubstantial," was the calm reply.

"You may well say that," exclaimed Mr. Bell, who had just let himself drop on to one of Pheenie's chairs, which had instantly collapsed with him, and he now sat huddled up on the ground, hemmed in with three bits of gracefully bending bamboo.

Even the discomfited Josephine laughed, and the light-sleeping native boy awoke, and, seeing a repetition of the former queer exhibition, laughed and choked till his companions thought he was going into a fit. Happily, the only fit that ensued was a fit of restored good-humour.

"Next time you make chairs, young ladies, please to make them of something less pliable," said their father.

"And next time you prepare dinner for men, please to let the first or second course be meat," added Ned, turning his attention once more to the light repast set out carefully on the green table. "This affair looks like the refreshments one has before supper at a party."

"And to add insult to injury," said the doctor, smiling, as he raised his eyes from a closer inspection of the table, "they have provided us with seasoning, as though they feared our appetites would require aid to get through this sumptuous provision."

As he spoke, he picked up one of Rosa's little balls, and bit it.

"If you please, father, those are pills, 'to be well shaken before taken,'" remonstrated Rosa.

"If you don't take care, ma'am, I will make you a dose of

tea with a handful of them. There will be no fear of complaints that it is not hot enough."

"Why, what are they then?" asked every voice at once.

"The seeds of the pepper plant, to be sure. They will be a great aid in Rosa's cookery."

"When she gets anything to cook," muttered Ned, disconsolately.





CHAPTER XXIII.

A MORNING PERFORMANCE AT LEAF COTTAGE.

THE light repast of cockles and bananas eaten, all the party, with the exception of the invalid Storton, set to work to fortify Leaf Cottage against besiegers. Once more Wow-wow rendered important service, both by his labour and by his knowledge of the various plants, leaves, and boughs most suitable for the desired purpose.

As night drew near, Mr. Bell and his assistants seated themselves beside the fire, and regarded their homestead with pardonable pride. But, whether from the excitement of the past thirty-six hours, from over-fatigue, or from a discovery, made too late to guard against it, that the sea curved very closely in upon the rear of the cottage which they had not fortified, the cheerful spirits that had animated everyone during daylight sank completely, and not one of the English group was inclined either to sleep or talk. The native boy, less sensitive to such influences, curled himself round, dog fashion, almost within reach of the flames, and fell asleep, much envied by his companions.

At last, hours after the whole landscape had been hidden in darkness, excepting where it was lighted up here and there with the fitful flare from the fire between the bars of the small stockade, Mr. Bell persuaded his daughters to retire to the

little apartment prepared for them, and sheathed all round with leaves.

The doctor then laid himself down in front of it, and soon fell asleep, wearied out with his last night's watching, and somewhat slowly his two companions followed his example.

They would have shown more wisdom if they had taken their sleep four hours earlier. As it was, dawn was beginning to flood the whole place with rosy light while they still lay wrapped in oblivion.

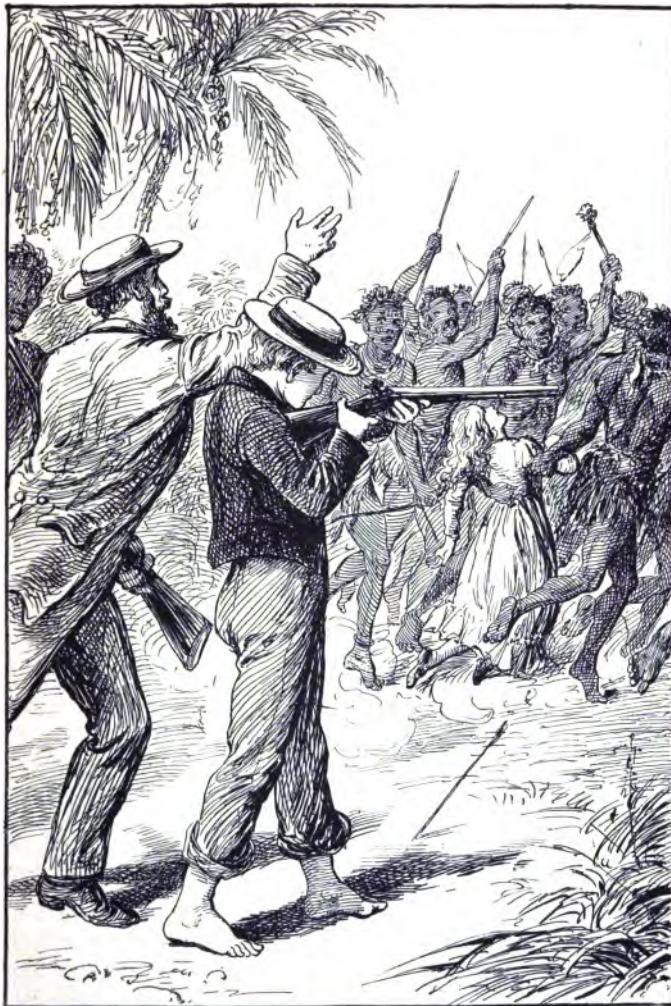
But if they chose to wake and sleep at wrong times, other people were more sensible.

When the brown-skinned thief, who had made the unsuccessful attempt to run off with Storton's irons, got back to his own people, he lost no time in stirring them up to revenge his injuries, and, representing that the numbers of the white faces were absolutely insignificant, he soon procured a fleet of volunteers to accompany him back to regain his iron treasures.

Happily for the white people, there was a life and death feud raging just then between the yellow islanders and the brown ones, who came of different races, and spoke a different tongue. Accordingly, when, just after day broke, Wow-wow was aroused from the final remnants of his morning doze by a rustling sound coming through the trees, he instantly sat up, and began to look about him.

For some moments even his sharp eyes were baffled by the cover afforded to the foe in the wood. At last, however, two brown fellows, more eager and daring than their companions, pushed straight forward swiftly for Leaf Cottage, and Wow-wow saw them, and trembling with terror he wriggled rapidly along the ground, stretched out his hand, and gave a vigorous tug to Mr. Bell's foot, and then a second. At the same instant there was a sharp, rending sound at the back of the cottage.

The doctor sprang up, and seized his rifle, still half asleep.



THE RESCUE.



"What is it? what is the matter?" he exclaimed, as his eyes fell on the cowering native.

The exclamation awoke Storton and Ned, the latter sitting up, and asking with calm drowsiness, as he rubbed his eyes—

"What's the row?"

Another moment, and wild cries of agonized terror rang through the leaf walls of the girls' room, and startled the three Englishmen into thorough wakefulness.

"Save her! save her!" shrieked Rosa's voice. Then—"Save me!"

The father, Ned, and Storton dashed themselves through the leaf entrance, Ned's rifle going off as he did so. There was a yell of astonished fright within the hut, a rush, and Rosa was free once more. But where was Josephine?

"There, there," gasped Rosa, half frantic with fear and sorrow. "Fly now, or it will be too late."

Past the stems of plantains and bananas Josephine's long golden curls were streaming behind her, as a couple of brown captors dragged her along between them, struggling and shrieking, towards the canoes.

She might have spared her struggles, poor child. Her little white arms were as helpless as reeds against the lean brown hands that grasped her, which, small though they were almost as her own, were so much more muscular. However, help was close at hand.

Regardless of the troop of natives, who were already beginning to rally from their sudden panic at the rifle, Mr. Bell and Ned rushed impetuously through the midst of them, overawing them by their fierce courage, and rapidly gained on the retreating robbers.

The natives had almost reached the shore. Once there, the prize must be theirs, and father and child would be lost to each other for life.

"Fire, sir!" exclaimed Ned, breathlessly, as the imminence

of the affair became each moment more apparent. Had his rifle been loaded he would, himself, have fired some minutes since.

Twice, already, the father had raised his rifle to his shoulder, and twice dropped it again. At Ned's entreaty he tried once more. But the effort was in vain; his agitation was too terrible. Almost flinging the loaded weapon into his companion's hands, he muttered hoarsely—

“ You fire. I cannot. Do not shoot my child.”

Ned's face brightened. He sprang forward. The doctor's weapon was a double-barrelled rifle, and Ned gave the natives the benefit of both barrels, one for each of them.

Yells of “ Ha-ee—Ha-ee” followed each report. Josephine's arms were released, and as she fell to the ground the robbers cleared the shore with a bound, rolled head over heels into the water, crept through it to the reef, over which they tore like mad things, regardless of cuts and scratches, threw themselves into their canoe, and paddled away as fast as they could go, without waiting for further dealings with either friends or foes.

Storton and his rifle had given the remainder of the troop, meantime, very impressive hints that the white colonists were not anxious for other company, and soon all the brown individuals and their canoes had departed from Shipwreck Island. History does not say what treatment the original instigator to this unprofitable expedition received on his return to the headquarters of his tribe, but it is tolerably safe to conjecture that it was something rather unpleasant.

A more important part of the matter, as regards us, is, that from this date neither he nor any of his people again ventured near the shores of the demon-haunted island, and, as far as they were concerned, our English friends were left at peace.

When Josephine fell to the ground her father paid no further heed to her captors, but ran forward, and threw himself down beside his little daughter, crying in a tone of anguish—

“She is dead! My child is killed.”

He would not let Ned come near her, nor would he listen to a word he said; and when Storton and Rosa came up with them two minutes later, he was still moaning—

“She is killed—my child is killed!”

“Killed!” ejaculated Storton, in a hushed tone of horror.

“Killed, did you say?”

“I don’t believe it,” said Ned, shortly and sharply. “I don’t believe she’s any more dead than I am. If a boy at school had gone on doing like Mr. Bell he’d have got hit. The shot never touched her.”

“And, except by some very sad mischance, it could not have killed her if it had, if that is all her father fears.”

“Come, sir, move. You are stifling the child. You—a doctor—to go on acting in this fashion. You surprise me, sir. There, she’s better already, now that she has got some air. Open your eyes, little one, and tell your father that he is behaving very badly.”

Thus advised, Pheenie did open her eyes, and gave a bewildered gaze around her. Then, as recollection returned to her, she raised herself up, threw her arms round her father’s neck, and burst into tears. That latter act did everybody good but Ned, who looked more indignant than ever, and marched off back to the wreck of Leaf Cottage, muttering—“What rubbish!”





CHAPTER XXIV.

SEEKING A SETTLEMENT, THEY DISCOVER RAFT BAY.

THIS visit of the "Brownies," as Ned called the recent disturbers of the peace, promoted a general wish to lose no further time in finding a more prudent spot for the settlement of the colony.

Accordingly, Rosa and Josephine having gathered together eight or nine of the cocoa-nut shells, and a gourd jar they had found in the village, to serve for drinking cups and saucepans, preparations for striking camp were completed, and, with the Indian for guide, the procession started upwards for the hills.

The morning was genial as a fair May morning in England, although it was nearly the midst of such winter as that southern island ever knew.

Skirting the palm grove and the rice-fields, the party reached the lake, on the beautiful banks of which a halt was called.

Rosa took advantage of the opportunity to remark to Bertram, in a tone of mock gravity—

"You have never once said you are hungry this morning!"

Ned's face flushed, and he cast a rapid, furtive glance at Pheenie's pale cheeks. Then turning away, he muttered—

"I suppose a fellow isn't obliged to be hungry unless he likes."

Rosa's eyelids dropped over the saucy blue eyes, and as

every one rose to commence the ascent of the hills, she hastened to Bertram's side, whispering—

“I beg your pardon. It's wicked to laugh at you when you saved poor little Josie. But please don't mind—I always laugh at everybody.”

“Yes, I know you do,” said Ned, in his turn laughing now. “I have found that much out about you quite well already.”

“Oh, I am so glad. Then of course it's all right, and I can do it as much as I like,” exclaimed Miss Rosa, joyfully. “I wish you and I might go on first. We shall never get to the top at this rate.”

However, the crown was reached at last, and the climbers felt amply rewarded for their toil by the beauty of the view spread out everywhere around them, while their curiosity was excited by another range of hills crossing the island, and shutting out from them what lay beyond.

Ned's vexation at having left the bathing-place so far behind vanished in delight when he reached the edge of the small plateau at the top of the hills, and, looking down the other side, he saw nothing but a gentle green slope of not quite a mile in length between him and a beautiful little bay, around the edges of which tiny wavelets were rippling with a most enticing aspect. Just at that point the reef and the island joined, and curved in with a deep indentation for the formation of this most convenient little bay.

“Hurrah!” shouted Ned. “Hurry up, all of you, hurry up. Here's something worth seeing, I can tell you.”

“There are a dozen reasons to make me as thankful as you for its existence,” said Mr. Bell, when he and Storton crossed to Ned's side, in obedience to his eager summons. “It looks tempting enough, for one thing, to induce passing ships to send a boat here. After all, we may be glad of a chance to escape some day to a less confined territory.”

“When that time comes,” laughed Rosa; “you remember

your prime minister is to provide us with the means of transport. He has found the bay in readiness for his fleet."

"It looks uncommonly as if there were a boat, or something of the sort, down on the beach already," said Ned five minutes later, returning to his companions after a rapid run part of the way down the slope to get a nearer view of the miniature harbour.

"Do you really mean that you have seen anything of the sort?" asked Mr. Bell, with an excitement that somewhat contradicted his recent expression of resignation.

Ned noticed the fact, and, fearing to raise false hopes, replied more cautiously—"I don't know. There's something on the beach that is not stone or shells or seaweed, I'm pretty certain, but I can't say more than that."

"Why don't you go and examine it?" asked the practical Rosa.

A short consultation ensued, which resulted in the doctor and Ned starting down the slope with the speed of anxiety and curiosity.

They were half-way down the hills before they got a fair view of the object towards which they were descending.

When they did so, both uttered exclamations of delight.

Ned shouted, "The materials for our house!"

Mr. Bell cried, "Our raft!"

They ran on again, and in a very few minutes stood alongside the raft, on which the Bells had escaped from their sinking ship. Whether the natives had conveyed it there for future use, or it had drifted round the island, been washed into the bay by the waves, and landed high and dry during the late high tide, it was impossible to say. The grand and delightful fact was sufficient for its finders, that there it was—planks, spars, ropes, sailcloth, all complete.

"This is indeed a blessing," said Mr. Bell, gravely and fervently.

"I should think it is, indeed! Just look here. And they're as good as if they had only just been made," said a rather choked voice.

Mr. Bell started slightly, and turned towards Ned. The next moment he burst out laughing.

"Come, young man, since you are taster to his majesty, and you seem to approve those biscuits highly, just hand one over here, please. It was my thought to put that cask on the raft. You should be grateful to me."

"And I just am, then," said Ned, heartily. "Oysters and cockles and bananas will eat ever so much better with biscuits to eat with them."

"Here is a barrel of something even more useful than the biscuits," said Mr. Bell, as the two continued their investigations, munching the while.

"What is it?" asked Ned, coming round with a heavy package in his arms. "Is it as useful as what I have got here?"

"Both are as useful as anything could possibly be to people in our circumstances," was the answer. "Your box is full of tools, I know, for I packed them myself. And this barrel is full of potatoes."

"How jolly. And that box over there has got a bit of pickled pork in it, and some red herrings."

"Another barrel full of red herrings, do you say?" said Mr. Bell.

Edward Bertram shook his head. "No indeed, sir. No such luck. Just a few. About enough to tempt us to do with them as the miser did with his bit of cheese—put them in a bottle, and rub our noses against it, as a treat, now and then."

"Never mind. I have a couple of fishing-nets and some fishing-rods and tackle, bound down with the ropes to the raft. So if you cannot catch yourself any more red herrings, I daresay you can get some other fish as good."

"Now, sir, do you mean?"

"Well, no, not exactly. For now, what do you say to our going back to the others, to let them know of our good fortune?"

Ned was quite willing. "But can we not take something with us as a proof?" he asked, with a longing look at the treasures he was leaving.

Mr. Bell laughed. "Not the biscuits, young man."

"Umph," came the subdued ghost of a grumble. "Well, what else, then?"

"Why, I shall be only too glad if you can carry up that box of tools while I roll this barrel of potatoes up the hill. I am sure you will admit that they are both first-rate examples of the value of our find."

In spite of his temporary disappointment as to those captivating biscuits, Ned agreed to this part of the bargain with the greatest alacrity, and the two companions began to remount with their treasures. They had not proceeded far, however, when their progress was arrested in a most awful manner.

No sound had broken on their ears since they quitted their companions but the gentle ripple of the water on the shore. Suddenly shrieks of the wildest, most heartrending agony burst upon them, and were repeated with terrible, mocking echoes from the cliffs. The two girls appeared, rushing down in headlong flight from the brow of the hill, their arms flung up to heaven, as though in an attitude of almost mad despair, while they continued to utter piercing screams that well-nigh froze the hearers' hearts.

Ned dropped his load, and Mr. Bell started aside from the barrel, which rolled and bounded back to the strand, splitting to pieces as it fell, and scattering the tubers far and wide.

"What new misery has come upon us?" they exclaimed simultaneously.

But the cry died on their lips, and their eye-balls seemed leaping from their sockets, when——



CHAPTER XXV.

WAGGA SAVES THE GIRLS' LIVES, AND PROVIDES HIMSELF WITH DINNER.

WTHE end of the page, and a sort of sympathetic gasp, brought our last chapter to a particularly abrupt termination. To resume.

The cry of consternation died on the lips of Mr. Bell and Ned, and their eyeballs seemed to leap from their sockets as Rosa's and Josephine's headlong rush brought them onwards, nearer and nearer, as though a sleuth-hound were at their heels.

Something still more deadly wrapped the girls in its awful folds. When Mr. Bell and Ned had descended to the shore an hour since, the sisters wandered along the brow of the cliffs, making explorations on their own account. Very shortly, coming upon a beautiful little lake, embosomed almost on the very summit of the hills, they laid themselves down upon its margin, beneath the shade of some dwarf fan palms, and soon fell asleep.

They awoke simultaneously with a suppressed cry, and a sensation of shuddering terror at some unknown evil. For a few moments they tried to shake off what they imagined but a nightmare dream. They sat up, and Rosa attempted to withdraw her arm from her young sister's waist. She could not!

They were bound together; and her effort was followed by a

sharp, low hiss from the long, thin snake that was coiled around them, and which was even then drawing them more closely together in its deadly clasp.

Most of you have, no doubt, seen pictures and casts of the world-renowned ancient sculpture of the Laocoön. I have seen the original itself, in the Belvedere of the Vatican at Rome, and I am not ashamed to confess that even before the inanimate marble my blood chilled, and I momentarily closed my eyes to shut out the awful, all-too-suggestive sight.

What then must it have been for these two young English girls when they saw, not a stone representation of one of the most tragical of mythological tales, but their own helpless living bodies linked together with this horrible writhing serpent chain. As their startled gaze fell on the gleaming, creeping folds and the glittering eyes, for the first minute a deadly faintness overcame them. But as it is with people in great suffering, so it was now with Rosa and Josephine. Their mad terror grew too great for unconsciousness; too great, indeed, for caution, prudence, or thought.

Rising to their feet, the two girls flew to the top of the hill, uttering shriek upon shriek, and incoherent screams for help. Then, catching sight of Mr. Bell and Ned, they rushed frantically down towards them, without hearing or regarding the cries of the native, who had just perceived their situation, and bounded forward to meet them, as they sped away in the opposite direction.

It is little wonder that the unexpected spectacle unnerved the unhappy father, while even Ned's presence of mind and readiness of resource failed him for once. At this dreadful crisis in the fate of the young sisters Wagga gave splendid proof of his kind feeling for his new friends. Flinging himself forward, in such a way as to arrest the panic-stricken flight, over which his unintelligible words had no power, he shook his fist with angry impatience in the girls' faces, as though a second

adversary had come to overwhelm them. His gleaming eyes and clenched teeth had the desired effect of cowing them into stillness sufficiently long for his purpose.

The snake had drawn its downhanging head in upon itself during its victims' headlong scamper, but as though it had been meantime employing the leisure in evil cogitations as to next proceedings, they no sooner came to a standstill than it suddenly reared its green and golden crest with a second venomous hiss, and darted it upwards towards Rosa's neck.

That moment its own neck was seized as in the grip of a vice, and its narrow, black forked tongue hung helpless from its jaws. Swift as thought it unwound itself from its rescued captives, and prepared to fling itself furiously round the native. At the same instant, however, Mr. Bell's pocket knife flashed in the light, and the next the heavy coils fell quivering and wriggling to the ground. Begging the loan of the unknown steel instrument, Wagga quickly finished the decapitation, and without waiting for thanks or praises, coolly proceeded to skin the slain enemy, and then marched upwards with the body hung about his shoulders like a long tippet, and ready to furnish him with several delightful meals.

The English people fell on their knees, and poured out their gratitude to the heavenly Father with the passionate fervour of men who have just seen those dearer to them than their own lives caught back, on the very brink of the great precipice, from an impending and agonising death.





CHAPTER XXVI.

LOST.

IT was a very unpleasant discovery to Edward Bertram that even a residence on desert islands had some drawbacks, but as getting away from the present one was among those things that are easier said than done, the question that remained was how to make the best of it.

An hour's diligent search resulted, fortunately, in finding a deep and wide alcove in one of the hills, which would afford a secure retreat in case of an Indian onslaught. As it also had the advantage of being close to the summit, whence views were commanded of the sea all round, no time was lost in building a tolerably substantial and air-tight home in front of it. The raft, and the box of ship carpenter's tools, were great aids in its construction, while Storton possessed mechanical genius that proved of great service in promoting the comfort of the small colony, and Wagga's knowledge of the good bread to be made from the pith of the sago palm, the eminently eatable biscuits to be sliced from the golden globes of the bread-fruit tree, and of the when and where to dig up the giant tubers of the yams, made him a very acceptable friend to Ned.

After the first few weeks our friends required little pity, so far as mere personal comfort was concerned. They had a good roof over their heads ; sailcloth, cotton, and monkey-skins

for garments ; thorns, fish-bones, and wood for needles ; cocoanut and palm-leaf fibre for thread. And as for food, they had abundance and to spare, when they once learnt where to look for it and how to obtain it. The bread has just been mentioned, or rather only some of it. There was palm-oil for butter ; crabs, oysters, cockles, and fish of all sorts to be obtained from the sea ; eels from the river ; rice and tea from the fields ; a plentiful supply of sweet water from the lakes ; sugar for the trouble only of cutting a sugar-cane ; birds for the snaring ; and fruits too numerous to mention.

When Ned's mind was once at rest on this score, and the works of general utility were fairly advanced, he announced his intention one morning of setting out on a long day's expedition across the other line of hills, to discover what lay on the opposite side.

The information was received in various ways, according to the disposition of the hearers. Mr. Bell mounted to the outlook, and took a long, earnest gaze all round the horizon to make sure there were no canoes in sight, and then begged Ned to look out botanical treasures for him on his route. Storton moaned over his lame leg, which prevented his indulgence in a similar pleasure. Impudent Rosa made up a huge packet of everything eatable in her store cupboard, and offered it to him as support for his journey ; and Josephine slid her little soft hand into his, and, with a quivering voice, implored Ned not to lie down to sleep anywhere, lest he should awake to find himself in a serpent's coils.

"All right, Pussie," replied Bertram, pressing the gentle hand before he released it ; "I'll think of you if I begin to feel drowsy, and then my thoughts will be so pleasant that I shall be sure to keep awake. Good-bye, everybody ; I'll be back before dusk."

The next minute he was running down through the trees, as if he were in a hurry to get into the school before the bell

ceased, instead of starting on a voluntary pleasure excursion. Nevertheless, great as his haste was, he did not keep his promise of returning before dusk. Night fell, and still the excursionist was absent, and when morning returned, and brought no signs of the missing friend and favourite, the dismay and grief were very great amongst the dwellers in the hill-side castle. Mr. Bell bitterly reproached himself for having allowed the boy to start off alone, to encounter the unknown dangers and difficulties of a region yet unexplored by any of them ; and, with the Indian boy for guide, he lost no time in following on his tracks, leaving his daughters to the care of Storton and their own vigilance.

Meantime, to return to the previous day, and to accompany Ned on his tour of discovery.





CHAPTER XXVII.

NED SPENDS A FEW HOURS WITH A MAN'S HEAD.

AT the end of about an hour's hard walking, Edward Bertram reached a break near the centre of the transverse line of hills, and at once took advantage of it, to save time rather than to spare himself the stiff climb over the summits. He had got half-way through the natural cutting, when a cave a few yards above his head attracted his inquisitiveness.

Swinging himself up the steep ascent by means of the vine tendrils growing over it, he soon stood at the entrance of the mysterious-looking cavern. An impenetrable darkness filled the interior for some distance, except where it was pierced by one thin shaft of light, whose source Ned instantly determined to ascertain.

It is tolerably well known by this time that Ned was no coward, and as for prudence—well, that was a word that he privately thought had best be omitted from a boy's dictionary; so with one parting look at the far-off glancing sea, the waving trees, and the bright sunshine, he plunged boldly into the darkness, guided only by the arrow of light quivering in the air overhead, while his path below was shrouded in most utter obscurity.

The opening through which he had entered already appeared to have dwindled behind him to a hole scarcely big enough

for a cat to pass through, and still he had not discovered the source of the rapidly increasing light. But he never for an instant dreamt of turning back.

Two minutes more, stumbling onwards over the rough uneven ground of the long gallery, and Ned suddenly brought himself up short with a startled exclamation, and a chill feeling of dismay.

Just beneath a natural shaft in the rock, about thirty feet before him, was a circular chamber, against the walls of which sat a row of grinning skeletons, gleaming in the flood of light that appeared to be poured down for the sole and special benefit of their eyeless skulls.

The sight was as ghastly as unexpected, and Ned for once repented of the love of investigation which had led to the discovery of this old native sepulchre. He remembered that he had got a mile to walk back through the darkness, with those horrid grizzly bones behind him all the time. For all he knew, there might be lines of them all along on either hand of him, and he began to have a creepy feeling that the long skeleton arms were stretching themselves out, and that the long skeleton finger-bones were hovering about, groping greedily for a clutch at his shoulder.

"But how absurd," muttered Bertram at last, with an impatient laugh, and trying to rally himself out of his uncomfortable sensations. "I shall be afraid of a nursery bogey next. Good-bye, old gentlemen."

As he made his mock bow, a gust of wind blew down the shaft, one of the skeletons started up with a tremendous rattle, bent forward, and—was gone.

Ned involuntarily leapt forward. His head shone for an instant in the light, a cry reverberated through the dismal tunnel, and the grim skeletons were once more alone in their glory. Where was Ned?

Well, poor old Ned was where there was some chance of his remaining until he got turned into a skeleton himself, beyond the reach of any known eyes till Doomsday. When he first gained sight of the unexpected human exhibition, he was so taken up with it as to pay no attention to the dim surroundings in his immediate neighbourhood ; accordingly, when he sprang forward, he jumped right into the trap before him, and fell headlong another fourteen feet lower into the heart of the hill. And there he lay, with no bones broken, but shaken and stunned.

His first thought, when he slowly recovered consciousness, was that he had been turned adrift on the Bells' raft at sea. Then he imagined himself once more in the reef grotto, and listened eagerly for Rosa's encouraging words of assurance. But, unfortunately, Rosa was as ignorant as Sir Edward Bertram himself of the runaway heir's doleful plight at that hour.

After a time he became aware of a pain across his shoulders, caused by lying so long on a hard, sharp bar of something. He roused up sufficiently to raise himself and withdraw the uncomfortable bolster. From the sudden way in which his fingers unclosed and dropped it when it appeared before his eyes, one might have thought it was a red-hot poker, or at least something that could bite. As a fact, it was only a skeleton's arm, and a trunkless skull at his feet grinned at him with gleaming teeth and sightless sockets.

"Oh ! bother," exclaimed Ned, "I've had enough of this sort of thing. It may be all very well for those horrid old monks in Rome to make playthings of their friends' bones ; for my part I prefer other sights, so I'll be off."

Pulling himself together, he jumped up and ran forward as though to leave the cavern. He had forgotten his tumble until he came in sharp contact with the wall of the lower cave, just out of range of the light. Then, indeed, he remembered

the additional discomforts of his position, and stood still to think.

"There must be certainly something of the rat about me," he remarked with a dreary laugh, "for I am always getting into a hole of one kind or another."

The one he was in now was of tolerable extent, but Ned's most diligent and prolonged examination of the walls all round, with his hands and straining eyes, did not result in finding any point at which he could climb back to the gallery from which he had fallen.

The walls in their whole circumference curved inwards, and that is a sort of wall, as you well know, up which not even a cat can climb.

The only outlet of any description from the skull-tenanted pit was an opening close to the ground, and about two feet square, beneath the broad ledge on which the skeletons were seated, and leading in the opposite direction to that from which Bertram had made his unfortunate ingress.

However, as the day passed on, he came to the decision that even unknown perils were to be preferred to the certain horror of his present position, from which there was scarcely a remote chance of rescue, excepting through his own exertions.

Summoning up all his resolution, and with a silent prayer for help and guidance, he slipped down on hands and knees, and dragged himself through the hole.

He was now in perfect darkness, and in a tunnel so low that his head touched the roof as he crawled along, and so narrow that his shoulders were every now and then even squeezed together by the rock.

Had Ned known the ordeal that was before him, it is probable that even his brave spirit would have quailed, and that he would have yielded himself to a death of effortless despair rather than face so much suffering to save his life.

For half-an-hour he continued his slow progress on hands

and knees. The cramped attitude and confined air were beginning to be almost insupportable, and he was on the point of trying to turn back to make a second effort to escape in another quarter. Then the passage suddenly widened somewhat, and became high enough for him to rise into a sitting posture, and rest awhile. Thus he got courage to go on.

Again the gallery narrowed down to little more than a tube, through which he had to drag himself almost at full length. Still he crawled on. The very awfulness of his present position seemed to help him to continue the struggle. There was something revolting to every noble human instinct in the death that threatened him. Stifled like a worm in a hole, never to be found till the hills themselves dissolved. It must not be.

At lengthy intervals, just when nature seemed almost exhausted, the gallery would improve. Once or twice he was even able to rise to his feet for a distance of thirty yards or so, and on one of these occasions a blessed glimpse of the blue sky, and a breath of fresh air, from a deep fissure in the hills beneath which he was burrowing, inspired his sinking heart with fresh strength and energy.

How long he continued his painful journey through the night of his living tomb he never knew. If time be reckoned by such things as thought, and bodily and mental suffering, he might have claimed a month at least as having been employed in his terrible travels.

At last, when he was utterly worn out, he emerged once more into a wide and lofty cavern, a fact of which he was made thankfully sensible by the great improvement in the air, for the darkness was as intense as ever. Feeling a floor of soft sand beneath his feet, he pushed some of it in a heap to form a pillow, laid his weary head upon it, stretched out his aching limbs, and fell asleep.

Countless are the instances on record of prisoners and martyrs sleeping peacefully the night before execution, so no

one need wonder that tired-out Edward Bertram slept soundly in a dungeon stronger and more pitiless than any of human invention, and from which there appeared to be scarcely even a faint chance of ultimate escape.

A new gaoler came upon him while he slept. A stealthily silent assassin stole noiselessly to his humble, unprotected bed.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN AWFUL ALTERNATIVE.

IT was well for Edward Bertram that, tired as he was when he gained the farther outlet of the dismal, tube-like corridor, he had yet sufficient thought for his comfort to make that pillow for his head before he lay down to sleep; otherwise his life and this tale might have come to an abrupt end together.

Slowly and softly, but with a deadly sureness and steadfastness, the silent assassin crept up about the simple sand-bed of the sleeper. And the assassin of that dungeon cave was none the less terrible because it was an unconscious one, ignorant of its own pitiless cruelty.

The fact was, that in the utter darkness Ned had flung himself down dangerously near to the edge of a subterranean lake, which, at high tides and in stormy weather, frequently filled to the overflowing of its banks. For the aggravation of Ned's misfortunes this circumstance occurred while he was buried in the depths of profound slumber.

Gradually the water soaked up through the sand, and Bertram's own weight aided to scoop out the grave to which the stealthy murderer was consigning him. And still he slept; and there was none to have mercy upon him, and to awake him.

A water-bed may be very comfortable for invalids, when the water is packed safe inside a waterproof sack, but otherwise, excepting in the hottest weather, and in the hottest countries, one would have imagined that it must have been disagreeable enough to have awakened even Rip Van Winkle himself.

And yet poor, tired-out Bertram slept, until at last the water crept up to his pillow, and touched his cheek with its chillness. That did arouse him somewhat ; but even yet he lay still, perplexed with dreamy fear and wonder, till suddenly a rush of water poured over his chin and into his mouth.

He woke up then, and no mistake, and started to his feet, or rather he tried to start up on to his feet. But it is no easy matter to get firm standing on sloping sand, in twenty or more inches of water, even when daylight enables you to see what you are about ; in darkness it is far more difficult, and Ned's attempt ended in his pitching head-foremost into the middle of his water-bed. Thus he got from the frying-pan into the fire, for his vigorous plungings and flounderings to regain firm ground finished by breaking down the thin edge that had hitherto divided his hollowed couch from the lake, and the next moment he found himself swimming for his life in the deep, unseen waters.

He was wide awake enough now.

Happily for Ned, he was one of those people who scarcely ever lose their presence of mind in sudden emergencies. Moreover, he was greatly refreshed by his long rest, in spite of its unpleasant ending. Accordingly, having come to the surface again after his involuntary dive, he set to work thinking what to do next.

“Get out of this horrible river Styx,” he muttered decidedly, at last. And turning right about, a couple of vigorous strokes brought him back to the shore, when he clambered up, and once more stood on dry ground.

For the moment he felt quite triumphant and thankful.

Unhappily, those feelings were destined, poor fellow, to be but too speedily crushed. Not ten minutes had passed before Ned had made the awful discovery that through those black, unknown, mysterious waters lay his only hope, his last hope of life.

Behind him lay the wall of rock, with its one narrow opening, through which he had so painfully dragged himself. He found that again with his groping hands, and turned from it shuddering.

But with all his eager feelings over that rocky end of the cavern, he could find no other loophole for hope. And in front of him lay that midnight lake. He could hear its soft wash against the cavern walls to the right and left. It spared not even so much as an inch of the shore beside it on either hand along which he could creep.

He lay down close against the wall of the cave, and tried to go to sleep again, with the longing that death might come to him thus, with pitying compassion. But it was quite as difficult to sleep as to get back to the upper world. His brain was tortured with the perpetual repetition of the alternative that lay before him—lingering death by starvation in that bitter dreariness, or an attempt, that might be fruitless, to escape through the unknown perils of that unseen lake, around which he might swim in the darkness, till strength failed him, and find no outlet.

He sat up, and dropped his aching head into his hands.

“If I were only not alone,” he groaned. “But no, no,” he muttered the next moment; “I don’t mean that. I’m sure I don’t want anyone else to be in this horrid pickle. If there were even a streak of light it would not be so hard to bear.”

Then he fell into a sort of stupor of despair, out of which he was aroused by a somewhat singular incident. He had allowed one of his arms to fall listlessly to his side, and suddenly,

beneath the hand resting on the sandy floor he felt a movement. Something cold and smooth was gliding beneath his palm.

A thrill of the most intense thankfulness passed through his whole frame. He was not the only living creature in that terrible dungeon! Instinctively his fingers clasped around the moving thing, and for a moment he held in his hand one of those strange little slim blind-fish, which thinly populate subterranean waters. The next instant it had slipped through and escaped from its unexpected captivity, and a faint little splash just before his feet told him in which direction it had gone.

A half sob burst from his lips at thus quickly losing again the companionship of this small link with life; but it had scarcely broken upon his own ears before a braver spirit returned to him. The moan changed into a defiant—

“I’ll have you again, you slippery little rascal.”

And Ned jumped up with an expression of grand resolve upon his face that was noble enough to make one think it was a pity none but the darkness saw it.

One moment more he turned towards the unseen entrance to the narrow gallery, and shook his head. It was very doubtful if he could survive a second of those horrible airless journeys, and if he could, to what purpose would it be, as there was no more likelihood of his being able to get out of the cavern at the other end now than there was before. He might as well starve to death in the present one, as go through a great deal of misery to starve to death in the other.

“But I won’t starve to death in either,” exclaimed Ned. “I’ll have another try for life, and if I fail, at least it won’t be my fault, and I’ve heard folks say that death by drowning isn’t as painful as others; so here goes.”

As has been observed before, Ned was no coward, and when he had once fairly made up his mind that a thing was to be

done, he did it. He made two firm steps forward, threw his arms above his head, and dived into the dismal lake.

There was a great splash, and the waters closed over his head. But he rose directly, and struck out to the left till he gained the wall.

In following that wall onwards lay his only chance of escape. If that led out to the upper world, it would lead him with it, if his strength lasted long enough. But he knew too well the bewildering pranks that darkness plays people, not to decide wisely, from the outset of his desperate enterprise, that he would keep close to his insensible guide.





CHAPTER XXIX.

“SPEAK FOR YOURSELF, IF YOU PLEASE.”

W~~W~~ED swam along vigorously for some time. Once he turned on his back, to try and husband his strength by floating awhile. But he soon found that would not do. The almost icy chill of the water was just bearable while he kept up his own warmth by constant exercise, but he felt numbness creeping over him the instant he ceased his efforts.

There was no help for it. He must swim on as long as he could, and if he had not reached the end of the lake, or the river, or whatever it should be called, by the time his strength failed—well, then—

“A fellow can but die once,” he murmured: and still he swam on. But as bodily weariness grew upon him, even to pain, his strength of mind began to fade once more into mournful despair. An absolute loathing for the black waters came over him—an agony of doubt as to the Infinite Compassion that could have consigned him to that most mournful, unseen death.

And, meanwhile, in the upper world night had come and was passing away, leaving his friends as sleepless with anxiety as it had found them.

Five minutes more—three minutes—two minutes—and all his strength would be gone—and he must sink, and die.

Never more see the sun, the sky, the waving trees upon which he had cast such a lingering glance twenty-four hours ago, as he plunged into the dark recesses of the hillside cave.

Already he failed, sometimes, to hold his head high enough to keep his mouth out of the awful hidden waters of that midnight pool. A bitter cry escaped his cold lips—

“Father! Father! show me the light once more before I die!”

He put out his hand, feebly, to feel for the wall. He grasped a corner. His heart stood still, and then began to beat with a wild tumult that threatened to burst its bounds. There was a pause—then he flung himself round the angle, and a smothered cry broke from his lips.

His prayer was answered, and no more.

At least thus it seemed to Edward Bertram, as he gazed with a sort of rapture upon the far-off, soft, dim twilight that met his eyes as soon as he had turned the corner. He was not condemned to die in darkness. As for living to enjoy light, that appeared more improbable than ever, for his very emotions of gratitude had taken power out of him; and as for swimming on to the source of that faint moonbeam of brightness, he knew well enough it was impossible.

However, he *must* get a little nearer to it; he must see it a little more clearly. He made two or three feeble strokes, and then uttered a cry of pain. He had cut his foot against a sharp-pointed rock. He swam on another yard, and then both his feet came in contact with sand and stones, and he stood up. He moved forward a step or two, feeling before him carefully with his hands as he went; and thus finding a natural bench in the wall of the cavern, he sat down for a while and rested, and felt thankful.

Impatience to reach the source of that dim light, from which he never took his eyes, soon drew him on again, and he kept

forward steadily, although his further progress was up a steep path that would have tried the strength and patience even of a person who had had no previous exertion. He stumbled on, over slippery stones and pointed crags, the salt water still trickling over his feet, a remnant from the stream that some hours earlier had fed the lake too bountifully for his safety. But although he moved on carefully—for he could not now afford to indulge in a third tumble into unknown dangers—he never stopped or hesitated. The light was growing clearer, and the air grew fresher with every onward step.

As he mounted, his head came closer to the cavern's roof; at last it touched it. He had to stoop, and finally to go on hands and knees, as he had done the previous day. But that was towards darkness; this was towards light. That was in a stifling atmosphere; this was with a breeze blowing in upon him, whose every breath gave him fresh nerve and energy. These things made all the difference.

At last his goal was reached, and he gazed through the rock window to which he had advanced so hopefully. He did not look quite so pleased as he had expected to do. And, for a remark in passing, if you cannot swim you had better make haste and learn, or, if you ever find yourself in Ned Bertram's position, it will be all up with you.

When our hero looked through that window of Nature's making, his eager eyes met with nothing but a wide expanse of blue sky and blue sea. He had no wings to fly upwards, and for the other element, as it was low tide now, the sea, which not very long ago had been leaping in where he now crouched, lay many feet beneath him. His burrowing journey had led him to the outermost edge of the reef, and he was as far from friends and food as ever, unless he had another swim for it.

"And I suppose that's just what I must have," said he, with a grim little smile, and shaking his head rather ruefully at the calm sea shining so placidly before him.

"What must be, must be," he added, a minute later. "And the less dawdling about it the better, perhaps. So here goes for the final item in my adventures."

So saying he dragged himself through the opening, held with his hands to the ledge for a moment, then, giving his body a swing out, so as to avoid the sharp sides of the rock, he went souse into the waves, which greeted him with the genial pleasantness of a warm bath, after his late experiences in the hill's heart.

He had not far to swim to gain a tolerable landing-place, up which he scrambled. Then he stumbled over the reef, waded through the inner belt of water, crossed the shore of the island, and, having gained the edge of the wood, he ate some fruit, and lay down and slept.

Meantime Mr. Bell and Wagga returned, after eight hours' fruitless search, to the rest of the party awaiting them on the brow of the hill. A consultation was held as to what should be done next to endeavour to find the lost pedestrian.

Rosa and Josephine had prepared quite a sumptuous meal to greet the return of seekers and sought, and they asked, with tears in their eyes, what they should do with it now.

"I am sure I don't know," answered Mr. Bell, irritable with anxiety. "It is no good serving it up, for no one will be able to eat it."

"Speak for yourself, if you please, sir," called a bright clear voice out of the bushes just below.

And the next minute the bemoaned wanderer ran up the remaining few yards to the lawn before Hillside Castle, and stood once more amongst his friends.

"You wicked boy, Ned, how dare you frighten us so?" exclaimed Rosa, between smiles and tears. "Don't you know you are dead?"

"Ah, just so," was the calm reply. "It's a way ghosts have. A skeleton half frightened me out of my wits, yesterday."

“How!” “How!” “How!” exclaimed every voice. “What do you mean?”

“Just what I say. But suppose we all have a try at Rosa’s cookery first, and then I’ll give you a full, true, and particular account of my adventures since I left you yesterday, and just see if I don’t send you all to bed shivering in your shoes!”

And so he did; the men for thinking of the awful perils through which he had passed, and of which the brave young fellow made so light, and the girls for thinking of what he called “a gruesome lot of skeletons.”

“All the same,” remarked Rosa; “I think I should rather like to try if I could squeeze myself through that narrow gallery.”

“And I shouldn’t,” replied Josephine, decidedly.

And then the two sisters slept, and had very uncomfortable dreams—Rosa, that she was transformed into a worm; and Josephine, that she was trying to rescue a dead fish from a black pool, and the fish had a face like Ned.

If Ned had any dreams himself on the subject of his late trials, he was wise enough to say nothing about them.





CHAPTER XXX.

“WHERE'S THE LARGE HAMMER?”

WEEKS and months passed on, after Ned's excursion through the hills, and our party of exiles had gathered about them many of the comforts and even some of the luxuries of civilisation.

The dozen books Mr. Bell had been thoughtful enough to save on the raft played an important part in the pleasures and employments of Hillside Castle, while their number was increased by a small weekly island journal, written on the rice paper shred from the pith of the *Arabia Papyrifera*, and to which all contributed, with the exception of the native.

But those two restless spirits, Ned and Rosa, began to weary terribly of the painful monotony of their lives. As long as there had been any real hard work to do, or constant excitement in making fresh discoveries, their energies had had scope enough, and they had declared, even more warmly than their companions, that the island was a perfect little paradise.

But when, largely owing to their own endeavours, their home assumed much the appearance of a beautiful, well-ordered cottage in civilized England, while a continuance of fair skies, gentle showers, and refreshing breezes made it appear that Shipwreck Island was indeed an abode of perpetual peace,

calmness, and plenty, then Ned and Rosa began to get heartily sick of it.

"Really," said Ned irritably, one day, "I begin to think that the snakes are blessings in disguise. If it wasn't for them, and the little excitement of tumbling over one of them now and again, I verily believe we should solidify into blocks."

Storton laughed. He felt the present peace, after his life of storm, an immeasurable blessing. Still he pitied his younger caged companions.

"What do you say," he asked, "by way of a change, to our all making an excursion to your skeleton cave?"

"The very thing!" exclaimed Rosa, delightedly. "We have not had a picnic for the past three months. Do let us go."

"Do let us go," echoed Josephine; and as every one else was agreeable to the scheme, preparations were soon made, and the party started.

Even Pheenie screwed up her courage to a certain pitch of eagerness to see the strange sight her friend Edward had described to her so often, and of which he spoke to her again as he helped her over the difficulties of the route through the hills leading to the strange and solemn mausoleum.

Arrived at their destination, Ned, who had purposely provided himself with ropes, got Storton and Mr. Bell to let him down into the lower cave, whence he handed up to the gratified doctor one of the three or four skulls that lay scattered about.

"It would be doing a much more useful thing," called down Rosa, "if you provided means of escape for any other poor creature who may some day be as awkward as yourself."

"Awkward indeed," returned Bertram, indignantly. "I should like to see how clever you would have been, if you had come, without any warning, on yonder lot of horrors."

"Never mind, Ned dear," said little Pheenie, soothingly.

"That's only Rosa's nonsense. I want to know how she means that you could help anyone else."

"Why, in the way that I have already thought of," answered Edward. And the next moment the sound of hammering reverberated through caverns and galleries with a perfectly deafening roar.

Having put into the rock, with some considerable trouble, two long and firm pieces of wood as steps, Ned next laid beside them a coil of rope, and two or three cocoa nuts. Then he got Storton to pull him up again, for although his steps would be better than nothing, in case of necessity, it would be rather a scramble to get up by them. He would have put up another had he really thought there was likelihood of their ever being required for use.

As the gallery was traversed on the return journey there was a suppressed cry from Storton, and Ned exclaimed anxiously—

"Hallo! What's happened? Are you hurt?"

"Thank God, no," answered Storton, earnestly, when they were all once more standing together in the open air. "But I am very glad to be safe out of that doleful place. A huge snake slipped from beneath my foot when you heard my cry."

"I vote," said Mr Bell, "that we carve up over the entrance here—

'CABINET OF HORRORS.'

"A very good suggestion," assented Ned. "And I won't be one of those who pay a shilling to enter. I've had enough of it."

All the same, he had to have some more of it, and very shortly too, before time had been able to take off the edge of his increased dislike to the place.

A few days after the trip, Mr. Bell was observed most busily and anxiously turning over all the household goods, ransacking

the cupboards, even looking about amongst the shrubs in the garden they had planted around the front and sides of their house.

"What is the matter, father?" asked Rosa at last. "What are you looking for?"

"Why, for the large hammer," came the vexed answer. "I cannot imagine where it can have got to. And it is much too valuable a possession to lose."

"I should think so indeed," said Storton, looking up from his carpenter's bench, at which he was fashioning wooden sabots for the girls.

Ned was busy breaking the clay mould out of an india-rubber canoe, but he dropped his treasure with a sudden start. Coming forward, he said as quietly as he could to his unsuspecting friends—

"I know where the hammer is. I'll bring it to you directly."

Then he went out. And as soon as he was out of sight he flew along like the wind. Had he been able to see an hour or two into the future, he would have felt that he was rather flying to meet death than to find a hammer.





CHAPTER XXXI.

POISONED ARROWS.

IT was true enough that Ned knew where the hammer was, but as for bringing it back directly, that was quite another matter, in spite of the promise he had so glibly uttered in his sudden agitation.

The truth was, that precious hammer was then reposing peacefully in the lower cave where Ned had dropped it after he finished hammering in the second step, and he had never remembered anything more about it until he heard Mr. Bell's answer to his daughter's question.

"It's a horrid bore," was Ned's inelegant but emphatic mental ejaculation, as he interrupted his fascinating occupation, and started off on his distasteful expedition.

Had he known all that was to come of it, he might have called it something more than a "horrid bore." But as he was rather ashamed of his carelessness, and had, moreover, no wish to let any of the others suffer for his fault by accompanying him as a sacrifice to friendship, as they were sure to do if they knew whither he was bound, he limited himself to his bare assertion and rather misleading promise, before he set off on his run.

He scarcely paused once even to recover breath, much less to look to the right or left, before he reached the cave

entrance. There, indeed, he did hesitate a few moments, and wished that he had brought with him one of the lamps of palm-oil Mr. Bell had manufactured for the general comfort. Storton's experience with the snake had invested the transit of even that upper gallery with an unpleasant amount of excitement. And, although the thread of light shining through it overhead was quite sufficient for a guide, it was utterly useless as an aid in avoiding ground enemies.

But that hammer had to be got at somehow, and Ned had to get it.

"And," he muttered, "unless I can manage to blow up the hill or dig through it—either of which undertakings are rather out of the possible just now—I've no way to regain the bothering thing but by the route I have travelled in safety three times already, so I must just hope for as good luck twice more."

At the very minute that Ned was thus soliloquising, Storton rushed down from the summit of the hill, just above the cottage, burst into the room where the girls and their father were quietly engaged with their various occupations, and looked round anxiously at the astonished group.

"What is the matter?" he was naturally asked.

For answer, he exclaimed—"Where's Bertram? We must keep together. I have just seen some canoes drawn up on shore. The occupants are already landed, and are out of sight."

Many months of freedom from unwelcome visitors had made our friends almost forget the possibility of ever again having trouble on that score. Storton's announcement was received with pale faces and startled eyes. Mr. Bell hastened to get the rifles down from their pegs on the wall, and the others anxiously repeated the query—

"Where's Bertram?"

Unsuspecting of the threatened danger, and unarmed, there was every fear of his falling into the hands of the enemy unless

he speedily returned to the settlement, or could be found and warned. But Mr. Bell dared not leave his daughters, and although Storton was all eagerness to go to the help of his companion, much time was lost in summoning Wagga up from the bay to give assistance by his wonderful tracking powers.

Meantime, Ned, having fought down his repugnance, passed through the opening in the hill, ran quickly along the gallery to the edge of the pit, and with some difficulty obtained a footing upon one of his wooden steps, and dropped to the lower floor. The object of his search lay close by, and he found it directly. But when he tried to remount, he got rather an uncomfortable tumble back again.

"Umph," he muttered, as he rubbed his bruised shoulder, "I think I'll give myself the benefit of a third step in a rather more convenient position before I make another attempt."

He little dreamt what that third step might cost him, of which he spoke so coolly.

And once more the sound of hammering broke the solemn silence of those lonely regions. The rock seemed harder than ever, and it was some time before Ned had succeeded in fixing another piece of wood sufficiently firm in its place to bear his weight. At length, having brought the hammer down pretty heavily upon his fingers, he decided he had had enough of that employment, and a few moments later he once more stood on the upper level, with the tool in his hand, and his face turned homewards.

At that instant the speck of light in the distance, which signified the hillside opening, was darkened. Ned hastened on. Very shortly he heard the tramp of feet, and the confused sound of voices coming along towards him through the gallery.

"Halloo," he muttered, laughing, "if they haven't found me out after all. From the noise, the whole party must have followed me, girls and even Wagga."

As a welcome to his approaching friends he shouted a loud, ringing, "All right. Come on, I'm here; but small thanks to you, good people, for blocking out the light."

He had scarcely finished when his shout was answered; but certainly not in the tones he had expected. A wild tempest of shrieks and yells rushed to his ears, and died, as though unwillingly, in howls and moans along the roof, only to be followed by another savage outburst of defiance. The feet, which had been advancing with a steady slow pace, now came flying towards him with their utmost speed.

For a few moments Ned stood motionless, as though he were spell-bound. Merciless foes were close upon him, and they were coming along the only path by which escape might have been possible. Even in that tenth part of a minute Ned seemed to remember all the dreadful accounts which he had ever heard or read, of horrible tortures inflicted by savages upon their victims.

But they were approaching rapidly. He could not stand still there and await them. Suddenly a thought, a gleam of hope, flashed into his mind. For the first time since his terrible underground sojourn he was glad to recollect that narrow corridor through which he had dragged himself, and its low entrance. He turned, and, regaining the edge of the pit, quickly dropped himself back into its depths. A minute later he lay crouched up just within the low passage between the two caves, the hammer, cocoa-nuts, and coils of rope beside him.

Bertram had scarcely thus withdrawn himself into comparative safety, when a group of twenty or more Indians issued into the light of the upper cave. The foremost carried nothing in their hands but implements of warfare. Behind them came half-a-dozen men bearing a litter of bamboo, covered with bark and green branches, on which lay extended a dead body; that of one of their venerated wizards, as he afterwards learned.

Behind these bearers again came more men, some with split tree trunks, others with food—parched rice, dried fish, and plantains—whilst one carried nothing but a small gourd vessel, slung in a net of palm-leaf fibre. The insignificant appearance of his burden was evidently counterbalanced by its important quality, for he guarded it with the greatest watchfulness, and all his companions showed the utmost care in the midst of their bustle and excitement not to tumble up against it.

When the whole party were gathered together in the weird mausoleum, a most tremendous jabbering began.

Ned, from his hidden post of observation, had seen the eager looks cast around by each gleaming pair of eyes as the owners rushed out into the cavern, and it was impossible to repress a shudder as he heard the howls of baffled rage that successively followed the discovery that the expected prisoner was not yet secured.

However, after a considerable amount of fierce and noisy talking had been got through, one of the corpse-bearers, who appeared to have some superior authority over his companions, managed to obtain a quiet hearing, and, having delivered his harangue, further proceedings were carried out with methodical deliberation. The split trunks having been laid over the chasm, by way of bridge, the wizard's body was carried across, and then carefully placed beside the skeletons of his predecessors in dignity. This business accomplished, a triumphant or funeral dance followed, and then the whole party sat down around the mouth of the pit, and lost no time in despatching the food brought with them, one of the hands of the dead man forming part of the meal, to Ned's horror, and being carefully shared amongst his bearers, as a mark of special honour to the departed !

Meantime, unfortunate Bertram was beginning to ache all over from his cramped position in the tunnel, and although he had an intense detestation of the mean and grovelling vice of

drunkenness, it must be confessed that he was grievously vexed to perceive that the Indians had brought nothing with them to drink more stupefying or sleep-inspiring than water.

“Oh! when will you take yourselves off again, you ugly wretches?” he muttered, irritable with weariness and anxiety.

At last they all rose, and he began to breathe freely again. Poor fellow! he had absolutely deluded himself into the belief that his dusky companions had forgotten the unlucky intimation he had given of a stranger’s presence in those sacred precincts, or that, at any rate, they had resolved to pay no heed to it. He was soon to be undeceived.

They had only acted upon Captain Cuttle’s advice as to attending to one thing at a time, and so making their pleasurable excitement last the longer.

The fact of the matter was, that the Indians felt like so many happy cats, who have a mouse so safely “cornered” that at any moment a paw has only to be put out to draw it within reach of the sharp teeth. Under such circumstances the cat does not hurry on to the final enjoyment, but as for forgetting its present or future pleasure! no, indeed.

The human cats enjoyed their dance and their feast ever so much more for the belief that they had a human mouse at their feet, only waiting to be picked up, and when the proper moment came they proceeded to secure it.

The leader of the party chose out two of his companions—the tallest, strongest, fiercest of the number, and led them to the edge of the pit. Then, while the rest spread themselves as a barrier along the mouth, Ned had the additional mortification of seeing his enemies, with uncouth grins of satisfaction, descend to his neighbourhood by the steps it had cost him so much trouble to make. He crawled a foot or two further into his hole.

"Wah!" exclaimed the seekers, in mingled astonishment and disgust, when, on reaching that lower depth and looking eagerly around, they found no one was visible.

As has been already mentioned, the wall curved inwards, as they knew, and the supposition had been that the prisoner was in useless hiding beneath the overhanging brim.

However, this second disappointment was received more quietly than the first had been.

A consultation was held with those above, and then for the first time Ned guessed the meaning of that carefully guarded gourd.

The man who carried it was called forward. The chief took a bundle of the sharpest pointed of the arrows, and dipped them one by one slowly into some liquid it contained.

A cord was then fastened round them, and they were let down to the ferocious hands stretched upwards to receive them.

Ned began to wish that he had even ventured a second crawl straight on through that horrible tube. Bad as that would have been, it could not be quite so bad as a death of agony in its cramped space from poisoned arrows. But there was no time to waste upon wishes now. Before he could have turned to begin his slow retreat the arrows would be after him. He must act.

He had one advantage over his enemies. He could see them, but they could not see him. They could see the low entrance, but even their keen sight could scarcely penetrate so much as a foot into the interior of the dismal subterranean lane. So far, Ned had the best of the coming battle, and he must make the most of it. The coils of rope, with a cocoa-nut fitted into the middle, made a tolerable shield, which he held in the left hand; in his right, he grasped another of those invaluable nuts as a missile, while the hammer lay before his knees as a formidable weapon in case of his assailants attempt-

ing the invasion of his territory and a combat at close quarters.

These small preparations took scarcely as much time to accomplish as they do to read of, but the dusky foe was equally prompt, and Ned only raised his shield just in time to receive the first arrow in it instead of in his forehead.

As the thud of the arrow against the impromptu buckler was heard, a yell of triumph arose at discovering the certainty of the pale-face's presence, and his near neighbourhood. A second arrow was ready to be launched through the dark doorway. At that moment some words spoken by one of the spectators above attracted the man as he crouched down prepared to shoot. He turned round, and, quick as thought, Ned hurled his missile at him.

Its effect was far more important than Ned had dared to hope. Bewildered with unexpected pain and surprise, the Indian started to his feet with a shriek, and struck his deadly arrow with all his force at his companion, of whom he had from the outset shown some angry jealousy.

Whether he really believed his bruise had been inflicted by his countryman, or whether he seized upon the pretext to gratify previous dislike, Ned, of course, could not determine; but, as the unhappy victim of his rage fell with a howl of the bitterest despair, the revenge he omitted to take himself was claimed for him by many eager partisans. Another arrow hastily dipped in the bowl of poison was hurled at the murderer, who, in his turn, found friends to espouse his quarrel.

In the hideous and fatal struggle that followed Ned was forgotten, and he even forgot his own dangerous position in watching the dreadful fight. It was more like a life-and-death battle between wild animals than between human beings. And, in the midst of all, the two miserable creatures with whom it had originated, lay moaning, shrieking, and writhing in all

the tortures of a most agonizing death ; none thinking to soothe their miseries with a word of pity, a kind touch, or a drop of water to cool the burning, swollen tongues. The sights and sounds presented to the onlooker's eyes were too much for him. His own troubles and sufferings were borne bravely ; but now he felt sick and faint, the narrow gallery seemed to contract suddenly into a still more stifling cage, and he swooned.





CHAPTER XXXII.

“I'M DEAD.”

WHEN Edward Bertram recovered consciousness, deep silence once more reigned within the precincts of that strange sepulchre. Having spent some minutes in most earnest use of both his eyes and ears, and discovered nothing more formidable than the dry skulls of old, and the distorted bodies of his recent foes, he managed, with some difficulty, to extricate himself from his hiding-hole.

In spite of his anxiety to get away altogether from the region, now become so doubly terrible, he was obliged to remain yet a little longer with his ghastly companions, whilst his cramped limbs recovered strength sufficient to climb to the upper surface.

He passed the time in covering the poor Indians with the boughs and pieces of bark thrown down in the late skirmish. This compassionate act performed, he mounted upwards, the hammer, which had so nearly cost him his life, slung to his waist.

Once more at the entrance of the gallery he paused and listened. Again a reassuring silence calmed his apprehensions, and he lost no more time in making another attempt to escape, a longing to warn his friends of the presence of strangers on the island adding speed to his feet.

As has been already seen, however, his friends had learnt that fact even sooner than himself, and he was scarcely more than half-way through the hills, when suddenly the sharp crack of a rifle broke the stillness, a little distance off.

"Too late!" he exclaimed, his steps arrested for a moment by the sound, and then he pushed on more quickly than before.

Early in the last chapter mention was made of a long delay in setting out to seek for Bertram, owing to Wagga's absence from the holding, grandly entitled by the exiles, "Hillside Castle." When he had at length been called up from the bay, and told the reason of the service required of him, fear and fatigue combined to render him a far less willing and serviceable aid than usual. More than two hours had elapsed before he and Storton drew near the entrance of the caverns. Even then, Storton had rather his own instinctive fears to thank, for the true guess at Ned's whereabouts, than any help rendered by the native's sagacity. He was engaged in reproving his guide's dilatoriness, when his harangue received a startling interruption in the shape of a shower of arrows that came whizzing through the air towards them, and fortunately fell harmless at their feet.

Wagga instantly took to his heels, and Storton raised Mr. Bell's double-barrelled rifle to his shoulder and fired. Whilst awaiting the effect of the shot upon the unseen enemies before discharging the other barrel, he heard a pitiful cry from his flying comrade, and echoed the cry the same instant, but in a very different tone, as Ned darted out into the daylight, and sprang towards him with the almost breathless questions—

"Are you all safe? Where are the others?—little Pheenie?"

"Thank God *you* are safe," was Storton's first reply, examining his friend from head to foot as he spoke, to assure

himself that he had really got him back, whole and sound. But Ned's anxiety could ill brook the delay.

"Botheration about me," he exclaimed impatiently; "how about the others?"

"All right," was the satisfactory answer Storton now found thought to give him. "At least," he added, "with the exception of that idiot Wagga, whose arrant cowardice has run him apparently into the very danger he was trying to escape."

As he spoke, a second cry reached them, more imploring than the last. "Misser Storton—Misser Ned, save me!"

Ned started forward in the direction whence the entreaty came. "Come on, Storton; we can't forsake the poor beggar."

So saying, and having just escaped from one peril, Bertram ran forward to meet another. His friend joined him, and their charity received one immediate reward, for their wholly unexpected advance totally disconcerted the adversaries' calculations, and a second and well-aimed flight of arrows fell as harmless around the position the Englishmen had just vacated, as the random one had done by which the native boy had been so terrified. Ned's nimble feet well seconded his generosity, and, closely followed by his companion, he soon came in sight of a party of ten or more of his late fellow-inhabitants of the sepulchre. In the midst of them lay Wagga, who had been thrown to the ground, and was now being tightly bound. At the present moment one savage-looking fellow was in the act of twisting a cord which he had passed round the prisoner's neck.

"Ah!" gasped Ned in horror, and with a cold sweat of dismay breaking out upon his forehead. Another second or two, and without succour the poor boy would be strangled. Even now his eyes were starting from his head, but their gaze was directed towards his English friends with a mingled expression of faith and agony that was irresistible.

Ned stooped and picked up two handfuls of stones. Rushing forward, he dashed them pell-mell at the group. More by luck than good management, as the old saying has it, his wild onslaught had the effect of, at any rate, arresting the victim's death, for the executioner dropped the cord to clap his hands to his own bleeding face, along which a great gash had been cut by a sharp fragment of rock.

Now was Storton's opportunity.

With a wounded cheek, and a charge of shot in his right arm, the savage had had enough of the contest; with the bestowal of a parting kick upon the prisoner, he made off to the boats, and a few more discharges of the wonder-working rifle had the expected result of sending his comrades helter-skelter after him, no one caring to be burdened with the bound captive, who was left upon the field as a trophy for the victors.

"Now, old fellow," said Ned, as he and Storton finished their task of unfastening his cords. "Now, old fellow, get up and come on!"

"Can't, Misser Ned, me dead!" answered the shivering darkie.

"All right, then lie there," retorted Ned coolly, and he and his friend forthwith made the best of their way home. The poor coward, seeing this, thought better of his statement, and got up, and made very good use of his dead feet in rejoining them. It is needless to say that the supper party that night at Hillside Castle was a happy one.

But Ned Bertram's life was not yet destined to be a smooth one. His next perils were to the full as terrible as any he had yet won through.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE NEW SCHOLAR OF NEWDIGATE.

YOU must now leave Shipwreck Island for a short time, and
WE return to the temperate regions of 52 deg., north latitude.

It is to be hoped that our readers have not altogether forgotten the existence of the ex-monitor of Errington. As he and Edward Bertram are tolerably sure to cross each other's paths again at some future day, it is needful that they should keep alive sufficient interest in him to remember, at any rate, his name and character.

Seven months after Jeffery Robinson left the school he went up to the university. Morose and unsociable by nature, the reports that he knew had gone thither before him to his disadvantage did not tend to make his looks more genial, nor his manners more friendly, at the commencement of his college career.

Self-consciousness made the new scholar imagine that he was a centre at which all eyes were directed in condemnation, and he revenged himself for this imaginary treatment by wrapping himself round in a cloak of sullen reserve.

The real fact of the matter was, that the small stir created by the flogging of his runaway schoolfellow had been forgotten, even by those who knew of it, while the majority of those about him had, of course, never heard anything of the affair whatever.

Nevertheless, although Robinson's antecedents were not to blame for his reception at college, his behaviour at the outset caused it to be chill enough to nourish all his gloomy apprehensions.

"What an awfully sulky-looking fellow the man is who's got into old Danvers' rooms," said a Newdigate man one day. "If he hasn't got a small skeleton of some sort in his private cupboard, I'm an ice-pudding." And he piled up his fire as he spoke, with the tongs' aid, quite scientifically.

"Ice-pudding, indeed! Don't talk of such horrible things," said a friend, who had just come in. "To hear you speak, one would think we must have got a jolly good hot August back again. Just move a step, and let a fellow get a sight of the fire. How I do abominate your 'brisk, bright, seasonable weather.' Who are you speaking of?"

"Why, the fellow who sat next you to-day. Do you mean to say that you did not notice how he slunk into Hall, and seemed to shrink before our eyes, as if he expected to be saluted with hisses or rotten eggs?"

"Shyness, all shyness. Lots of fellows look like whipped dogs when they first come up fresh from a home-tutor and the mother's apron-strings. They think that everyone is on the alert to get a rise out of them."

"Umph," said Dryden, as he dragged forward a second chair for the accommodation of his feet. "I am glad, at any rate, shy or not shy, that all fellows have not got that chap's hangdog look about them. I know this, if they had, my set would be very select—myself and myself—and yet again myself."

"And no bad thing either," grumbled the shivering friend, "on horrid cold days like this. I shall go back to my own fire."

"Nonsense, old fellow, just stay where you are," answered Dryden. "And as for cold, stuff, you're in the dumps. It's

above temperate. Put on the kettle for me, there's a good fellow, and get out the marmalade, and toast these muffins, and you shall have tea. Meantime I'll read you a glorious scheme I've jotted down of what a prize poem ought to be."

And thus Jeffery Robinson was dismissed from his new companions' thoughts, and the host for the evening easily and gracefully did the honours to his guest by allowing him to forget the chillness of the October air in working for the comfort of both.

"It is all strange to you at present, but you will find university life very enjoyable when you get more used to it," said his tutor, kindly, to the intellectual but gloomy-looking Robinson at their first interview.

"I have come up to work, not to enjoy myself," muttered the young man, ungraciously. "Is there anything more for me to learn as to lecture hours?"

"Nothing more. Good-morning."

Jeffery Robinson bowed and took his departure, and Mr. Chase, the tutor, sat for a few moments looking absently at the door through which he had just passed. At the end of that time his thoughts expressed themselves in the outspoken quiet remark—

"My new pupil may be a genius, but he is an intensely disagreeable fellow at the same time, and I expect can be abominably impertinent. He had better try nothing of the sort on with me, however."

And then the tutor, in his turn, dismissed him from his thoughts.

The weeks passed, and Robinson was as much alone at Newdigate as if he were a solitary dweller in a college that had been swept by pestilence. He showed no human sympathy for others, and he received none. He always went into the Hall for dinner as late as possible, and got away as soon as he could, and after the first few days, when every attempt at

conversation with him had met a sullen rebuff, men very seldom spoke to him.

His rooms were rarely invaded by friends or foes. Not even the most mischief-loving cared to inflict their ingenious attentions upon him, or to make him the subject of any of their practical jokes.

He scarcely ever went out, except to chapel and lectures, and altogether his life was as dreary as Sir Edward Bertram in his most vindictive moments could have possibly desired.





CHAPTER XXXIV.

SIR EDWARD BERTRAM'S HOPES.

WHILE we are in England, a passing glance may as well be bestowed on Ned Bertram's old uncle, the Waterloo veteran.

On the morning when we reach Bertram Hall, Sir Edward Bertram's splendid place in Gloucestershire, a year has passed since we last travelled thither with the old General, a few weeks after the flight of his neglected heir from the public school of Errington.

“Good-morning, General. I hope, sir, that I see you pretty well this morning.”

So spoke Mr. Jarvis, Sir Edward's steward and factotum, on entering his employer's library about eleven o'clock one bright day in May.

Mr. Jarvis had just come in from the brilliant sunlight, and his eyes required a few moments in which to get accustomed to the comparative darkness of the library. When his powers of vision had regulated themselves to different circumstances, a suppressed exclamation escaped him, expressive of sharp self-reproach.

Everything out of doors had looked so bright and cheerful that the steward's feelings were bright and cheerful also, and

his voice had had almost a jaunty tone in it as he uttered his morning's salutation and well-meant hope.

But his greeting received no answer, and when his eyes at length really saw the General, he experienced a sudden shock, and all his joyousness died out of him.

The elbows of the veteran soldier were planted on his writing-table, and his grey head was buried in his muscular, bony hands. The whole attitude was that of a man irremediably miserable.

"Any bad news, General?" asked Mr. Jarvis, with hesitation and alarm.

Still no answer, and he advanced a few steps nearer, and yet more nervously repeated his query—"Any bad news, General?"

"Yes," growled Sir Edward Bertram, suddenly looking up, and showing a ~~white~~, set face—"yes—no news."

"Oh! ah! yes—I see," muttered Jarvis, looking much relieved on receiving this very contradictory reply. He added aloud—"But, if you'll please to remember, General, I warned you long ago that it would be no news to me to learn that you had not heard of your heir by this precise date. I don't call silence in that direction bad news."

"Then I should like to know what you do call it, sir—what you do call it?" shouted the old soldier, with the stern fury with which he might have rallied a body of wavering troops. "Can't you say, sir, what you do call it?"

Well, to tell the truth, that was one of the things that the steward was not able to say on the moment, so he stammered over first one word, and then over another, and then relapsed into silence.

"Ah, ah! you see," growled Sir Edward, with a grim chuckle, "you don't call no news bad news, only because you haven't the wits, man—the wits—to call it anything. So just listen to me, Jarvis. You can do that, I suppose, can't you?"

Jarvis bowed.

"Umph," muttered Sir Edward, "now you're rubbed up the wrong way, I suppose, and feel in a rage. Well, I'm rubbed up the wrong way, too, and feel in a rage. You're in a rage with *me*."

"No, sir; no, General. Oh——"

"Hold your tongue, Jarvis—don't interrupt. You're in a rage with *me*——"

"Oh, dear sir, no. I——"

"Hold your tongue, sir, hold your tongue," shouted Sir Edward, starting to his feet. "I won't be silenced, sir. My voice has been heard on the field of Waterloo, sir, after the Duke's, and do you suppose I'll have it silenced in my own library!"

"Oh pray, General, believe——"

But the General looked so minded to fly at him, that Mr. Jarvis waited for no spoken orders, but broke off his intended speech himself that time, and his fiery companion continued—

"You're in a rage with *me*, and I'm in a rage with fortune, and so we're quits. And I tell you this—and just be so good as to remember it for the future when I ask you—no news, at the end of a long year and two months, of my great-nephew and heir, Edward Bertram, *is* bad news, and bad news that I—I—find it hard to stand—up against."

With the last words all the forced passion had died out of the poor old General's face—all the forced energy out of his body, and he once more sank down in his chair, weary, weak, and helpless.

Jarvis drew nearer. A low moan burst from the old man's closed lips, and Jarvis drew close to him, and said gently—

"Several of the ships that started away from English ports for the antipodes last March twelve months have not returned yet. Your nephew is, no doubt, in one of them."

"Yes, yes; that is true—that must be true," assented the

General eagerly, and snatching at the crumbs of comfort offered him. He took one of his hands from his face, and grasped the steward's.

"You're a good fellow, Jarvis, and I'm a bear—a—"

"Oh no, Gene—"

"Now, now," testily. "There you go again, interrupting, and I won't stand it. Do you know, Jarvis, your besetting sin is a love of interrupting me. Now watch against it for the future, there's a good fellow—especially when I've got the gout; because, you see, your besetting sin brings out my besetting sin, which is—temper. But we'll argue that matter over a glass of port wine, one of these days, and meantime, about these ships. Have you found out anything more about any of those that left our shores about fourteen months ago?"

"Yes, General. When I was in Liverpool last week I made a few inquiries here and there, and I learnt that two vessels started on their voyages about that date, that are expected to be away, the one three years and the other five years. And on both of them boys shipped themselves at the last moment."

Sir Edward straightened himself up, with sparkling eyes. "Why, Jarvis," he exclaimed in a tone of joyful certainty—"of course those boys are my nephew, Edward Ber—"

"One of them," interrupted Jarvis, in an apologetic manner.

"Ah, well, perhaps—yes, of course, one of them," assented the General slowly, loath to give up the double chance, but letting the interruption pass for once. "Yes, one of them, Jarvis—the one on the ship that is gone for three years, no doubt. We'll find out all the ports it was expected to touch at on its homeward route, and send letters to them for the young rascal."

"Yes, General."

"And, Jarvis, go on planting, and keep the tenants up to the mark. No harshness, you know; but I won't have the boy find a slovenly estate when he gets back to us—Jarvis!"

“Yes, General.”

“Fourteen months from three years leaves a year and ten months ; doesn’t it? Ay ; but, Jarvis, that is a long time for an old man to wait. The young can live on hope only, it is hard for the old to do so.”

Once more the old, brave soldier’s head sank wearily and sadly down, and the steward began to fear whether he had done more harm than good by endeavouring to draw comfort and encouragement from circumstances that he himself secretly considered had very little to do with the unknown fate of the lost boy.

Jarvis heartily loved his irritable but upright and generous employer, and although of a naturally quiet and peaceable disposition, he would gladly have done violence to his own feelings, for once in a way, had fortune so far favoured him as to enable him to horsewhip Jeffery Robinson, whom he looked upon as the author of all Sir Edward’s misery. The baronet himself continued, from time to time, to recur to the threats he had uttered in Dr. Brown’s library against the ex-monitor. On several occasions, when the gout was unusually troublesome, and temper and spirits consequently at their worst, he had resolutely declared that he would start off to the university, and denounce the scholar of Newdigate College as guilty of manslaughter, and half-a-dozen lesser crimes. He had even gone so far once as to order out his chariot and post-horses for the journey. But better feelings had hitherto prevailed, and, so far as Sir Edward Bertram was concerned, Robinson had been unmolested, and left free to establish for himself a good character in his new sphere. We have already seen how small advantage he took of his opportunities ; and we will now again take flight from England for the sunnier clime and brighter shores of Shipwreck Island.



CHAPTER XXXV.

A SOUTHERN STORM.

■ N our last chapter we spoke of returning to the sunnier clime and brighter shores of Shipwreck Island ; unfortunately, when we again visit it, after a lapse of more than two years, its appearance is anything but cheerful, and justifies its lugubrious title. It has been lately visited by several wind-storms, the traces of their devastation being everywhere visible, and a gloomy canopy of clouds overhead, a leaden-coloured sea, and an oppressive atmosphere threaten their speedy continuance.

Hillside Castle, in spite of its lofty position, has not at present suffered, the shrubs and climbers that have been planted about it, and grown over its walls, serving as some protection ; but the garden is a perfect wreck, and so is a great part of the wood in which Ned Bertram, Storton, the native, and Mr. Bell are now hard at work making canoes.

“The storm has done us one good turn, at any rate,” said Ned, as he vigorously continued his occupation of scraping out the burnt ash from the hollow trunk of a tree recently uprooted.

“Ay, indeed,” replied Mr. Bell. “It would have cost us a considerable amount of time and trouble to get these trees down, ourselves. But we must not waste breath in talking, for, if I mistake not, this wood will be no safe place to be in, an hour or so hence.”

The words had scarcely escaped him when a low growl, as from some wild animal, sounded through the trees. But the growl was the warning of something more ominous and untamable than the fiercest beast. The experience of the past fortnight had taught the exiles what it signified. A moment later a giant tree fell with a crash, snapped short off close to the ground, and Ned and his companions covered their eyes with their hands, blinded with the serpent light that had flashed out from the darkness gathering up around them.

The tropical storm had begun—such a storm as the people of northern climes can scarcely imagine even in their dreams. Peal on peal of “Heaven’s artillery” cracked and roared in their ears. At alternate instants the whole region round them appeared wrapped in living fire, or clothed in the blackest night. The wind seized savagely on glorious, wealth-crowned forest trees, dashed them down, or flung them away as so many dead and sun-dried saplings. The hot lightning breath stole within them, and converted their own life-blood into their destroyers, splitting them asunder like reeds. Ground plants were torn up as though with invisible hands. Whole tracts were laid bare, and the raging sea was audible over all, as the waves lashed themselves against the reef.

Simultaneously the workers in the wood cast down their tools and fled. Bravery and defiance are vain against the forces of the elements.

When they were clear of the falling trunks and whirling branches, they were removed from one danger only to meet with another in the gusts of wind which wrestled with them, and almost baffled their most desperate efforts to proceed.

The plateau was gained at last, and the shelter of the home walls; but not a moment too soon. The terrified girls had sought safety in the alcove under the hill, and thither the others now followed them.

Scarcely were all the party thus securely housed than a

wilder, more awful blast than ever, swept over the island. There was a crash, a rending—and in one atom of time the home, that had been perfected with two years of unending care and elaboration, was gone.

Out at sea, tossed hither and thither on white crests of the fierce waves, was the ruined nest of the handful of English exiles. What little remnant was spared by the first blast was carried off by the next, and the spoliation was complete.

The bitterness of the storm was spent. The once beautiful island was a wide scene of wrecked and torn desolation, and the thunder ceased, the wind fell by degrees, gradually dying away at last in soft sighs, as though wearied with its cruel sport. The skies cleared, and a troubled heaving of the sea alone recalled its recent turbulence.

For three or four hours scarcely a word had been spoken by the Bells or anyone. At last Ned broke the silence, sharply, and almost fiercely—

“ Let us get away from here. I was beginning to grow sick to death of the confinement of our narrow cage; now I hate it. Let us get away.”

“ We must—we have no choice,” said Mr. Bell, wearily, “ unless we are willing to stay here and die. Encumbered as the island now is with dying vegetation, it will most probably become a hotbed of fever in a short time hence. Besides which, I expect both fruit and birds will be very scarce for a good while, and we have lost nearly everything that made our stay here tolerable, and two of the rifles that made it safe. We must leave, and quickly.”



CHAPTER XXXVI.

NED AND HIS COMPANIONS QUIT THE ISLAND.

THREE days after the storm, a singular-looking group was gathered on the shores of the little bay. A couple of canoes, made according to the native's directions, had been carried thither and launched on the clear waters. Both of them were duly furnished with paddles, and provisioned with such food as the devastated island still afforded. Their intending crews presented a spectacle queer enough to provoke laughter, had not the faces that surmounted the oddly-fashioned and clumsy garments looked so grave and anxious.

Monkey skins, and a sort of sackcloth of cocoa-nut and palm-leaf fibre, eked out the remains of the sailcloth, while the two girls had contrived, by means of knitting-needles which Storton manufactured for them, to make themselves rough cotton dresses from the abundant cotton plants on the island. Collars, capes, and aprons of lace-bark, cut from the lace-bark tree, and fastened by strings made of the woody fibre of rotten screw-pine stems, completed their uncommon costume.

It must be added that the whole party wore plaited leaf hats, and shoes, lined with cotton and feathers, and made of india-rubber from the gigantic climbing plant, the *Urceola Elastica*. So clothed, and unencumbered by luggage, our friends stepped into their small barks, the three Bells into one, Ned, Storton,

and the native into the other, and bid a final farewell to Shipwreck Island.

There was some sadness in the Bells' good-bye to their late home, but none in Ned's. He had long known every yard of the place, and craved for a wider sphere with the natural restlessness of youth.

"Thank goodness, we are off," he shouted gladly, as the two canoes cleared the bay, and were rowed out to sea.

Mr. Bell's tone was not so gleeful as he asked their pilot, for the twentieth time—

"Are you sure we are within a day's row of other land?"

"Ay, ay, Misser Bell, no hab fear, all right," was the confident answer.

More confident, indeed, than future events justified. Wagga had no intention of taking his white friends to his native island to be massacred, and the position of the other one he had forgotten.

"You are sure we are rowing in the right direction?" asked Ned, late in the afternoon, and resting on his oars to take a good look about him.

"Ay, ay, all right, all right," was the quick answer. "Yellow fellow row now; gib him oar; row hard."

"Row as hard as you like, I don't believe we shall see land before nightfall," muttered Ned, with an anxious glance towards the occupants of the other canoe.

Had he been able to see but a few hours into the future, he would have known that they less needed pity than himself.



CHAPTER XXXVII.

HAMMERING A SHARK.

OUT at sea in a canoe made of the single hollowed-out trunk of a tree, with food enough to last three persons tolerably well for a couple of days, in the midst of an utterly unknown waste of waters, and unprovided with a compass.

The situation was neither safe nor cheerful, and Ned Bertram and Storton looked grave enough when day dawned, and they once more took the paddles in their hands.

The sudden night of the tropics had fallen upon them, as Ned had anticipated, while they were yet out of sight of land. For some time an effort had been maintained to keep the canoes together, but in the darkness collisions had twice occurred, threatening to upset one or both of the light boats, and eventually the dangerous attempt had been relinquished, and the canoes suffered to drift with the tide.

When morning broke, the Bells and their canoe were nowhere to be seen.

“They were ahead when we laid down the paddles last night,” said Ned. “No doubt they have been carried along rather faster. Let us catch them up.” With this resolution the two Englishmen bent to their oars with a will. But to catch up their friends was easier said than done, seeing the Bells were then on board a fast-sailing vessel bound for

America, while Ned was rowing in the directly contrary direction.

About a couple of hours after the two canoes had been washed apart by the waves, and carried far out of hailing distance of each other, a flash of summer lightning had revealed the party of Bells to the look-out on the American ship. In another five minutes they would have been run down and drowned; as it was, they were rescued, and taken on board. But no entreaties could prevail upon the captain to keep up, during the night, what he termed a wild-goose chase after canoe number two. The Bells had to be contented with their own safety, and to pray for that of their friends.

The long day passed on. Ned and Storton rowed when they could, but chiefly for the sake of occupation. As the morning wore away, they lost all hope of coming up with the other canoe. The fierce rays of the sun blazed down upon their heads, and the native sat crouched up at one end of the boat in a state of semi-stupefied despair.

"Our dismalness has spared the food to-day, at any rate," said Ned, rather grimly, as the second night drew on apace, and he began to feel hungry after his long fast, as the air grew fresher.

But although they had eaten nothing all day, they had nearly emptied the water-jars, and when Storton's request that he might have another draught now, instead of food, was complied with, there was not a drop left.

The second night passed, and again the sun rose, rushing up in the heavens as though in haste to mock at their helplessness. Ned had been craving for some months past for more excitement and adventure than that afforded by snaring parrots, cutting sugar-canies, and making botanical discoveries, and now they had come to him in full measure. More than once a longing after the past two years of peacefulness on Shipwreck Island came upon him. And through the feverish mist, that

ever and again danced before his eyes, the delicious, cool, clear waters of the two lakes seemed barbarously to tantalise him with their near neighbourhood.

A third night came, and crept onwards into a fourth fiery, burning day. Two sharks appeared in the wake of the canoe. Storton had been leaning forward for some time with closed eyes. At Ned's exclamation, he opened them and asked eagerly whether land were in sight.

"Land! No indeed," answered Ned with a shudder. "Look there!"

After Storton's first glance, he appeared fascinated by the horrible, bloodthirsty creatures.

"Ned," he whispered hoarsely, "which of us do you think they will have?"

Ned started and stared. "What do you mean?" he exclaimed, half-angrily. "Our position is not so lively that you need add to its wretchedness by such ghastly jokes as that."

"Jokes!" repeated Storton in the same tongue-dried, harsh whisper, and still following every movement of the great carnia—“I meant no joke. Don't you know that the sailors say sharks that have once begun to follow a vessel never leave it till they have received toll from it? I believe them now.”

"I know sailors talk a lot of stuff, and you too," was the sharp answer, accompanied by a keen look at the gloomy prognosticator. "You are tired. Lie down and go to sleep."

Storton withdrew his eyes heavily from the sharks, and stared at his young companion's firmly-set face. Ned met the look with calm determination. "Lie down," he repeated sternly.

"Give me a drink of water, then I will," moaned the poor fellow humbly. He was already more than half-delirious with fever, as Ned had just perceived.

Bertram looked into the gourds and the earthen water-bottle. All were empty; not even a drop of moisture remained in any of them."

"Just one sup of water, and then I'll obey you," moaned Storton again.

Bertram gulped down a lump in his throat, and then turned and faced his companion again, with the stern words—"I can't. You must obey me without. Lie down."

Cowering back in fear from his companion now, Storton lay down beside the Indian, and Ned dropped his face into his hands to pray and think.

"What shall I do?" he muttered. "What is it best to do?"

And then he looked up. A dazzling sky overhead, a dazzling sea all round, a small canoe, no water, one man in a state of stupor, another in growing delirium. "What is it best to do?"

Then Ned's eyes met those keen, shining eyes within a few feet of the canoe's side. And in his turn, as the scorching sun seemed to set the blood in his veins boiling, he watched them swim now before, now behind the frail craft. Now they swam in company along the right side, and the next minute his head grew giddy as he turned from right to left, and left to right, to see what first one and then the other might be up to.

Now and again one of the sharks would raise its blood-thirsty head out of the water, and snap its jaws, as though in rage at the long-delayed feast. And Ned shuddered, and the agonizing beating of his heart was audible.

"Oh my God!" he muttered, "any death but that, any death but that—have mercy!"

And still the sun blazed on, and Ned felt the fever gaining ground against every effort of his will. The sharks kept close to the canoe now. There was no more careless indulgence in turnings and twistings and divings. With an awful instinct of

the bitter imminence of the situation, the two monsters settled into a calm, persistent, slow movement behind the slowly-drifting canoe, their cruel teeth within four feet of Ned.

The sun began to sink. The day, with its heat and intolerable thirst, had been awful, but all its miseries seemed to sink into nothing before the thought of having those two sharks for companions during the long hours of helpless darkness. The very idea rendered Edward Bertram desperate, and fought down his feverish lassitude for a time.

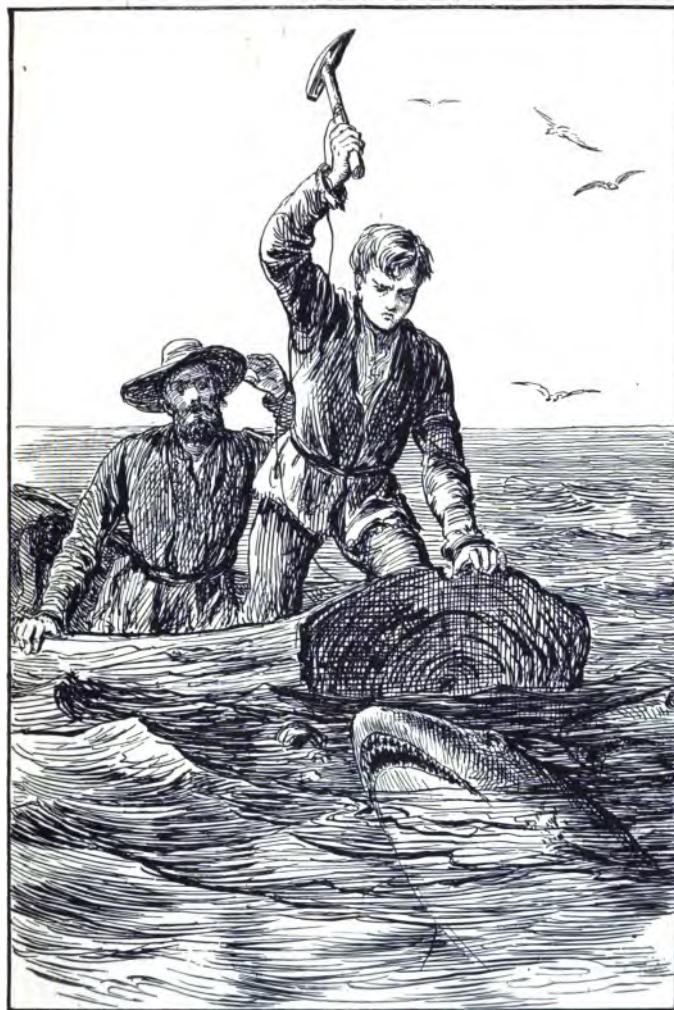
He must do something. He must make some attempt to get rid of them, or drive them off. Kneeling down in the bottom of the canoe, he pulled out everything that had been stowed away in the foot square hold, made in the thickness of the wood at the stern of the boat.

Amongst other things, he turned out a forgotten bunch of bananas and a cocoa-nut, articles invaluable in the present burning thirst. But for the moment even they were pushed aside, for something more immediately desirable in the seeker's eyes.

Such tools as had been in use in the wood the day of the final fearful storm had been saved from the tornado that swept away all the contents of Hillside Castle, and they had been divided between the two canoes. Amongst those at Ned's disposal were a heavy hammer and a sharp, finely-tempered chisel. Both these tools he fastened separately to two lengths of rope.

Laying the chisel beside him, Bertram took the hammer in his hand a second time, and pulled at the rope he had fastened round it to make sure that it was secure. Then he coiled a twist or two of the other end about his left wrist and fingers. His preparations so far made, he knelt up in the canoe facing the sharks, and threw out to them some old banana skins and an empty gourd.

—



A TERRIBLE MOMENT.



The daintiness of sharks is fortunately in inverse proportion to their greediness. Without waiting to ascertain the nature of the gifts so unexpectedly offered them, the voracious creatures no sooner saw the refuse coming than they turned over on their backs to receive it. Now was Ned's time.

Steadying himself, and setting his teeth tight, with the swiftness of thought he seized the great hammer, and with the whole power of his strength raised it above his head, and flung it crashing down upon the upturned foremost shark.

The energy of his throw nearly pulled him over the side of the canoe, and before he could right himself again, or discover the effect of his heavy missile, he felt a hot breath on his cheek, a heavy hand on his shoulder, and he turned to meet the glittering eyes of Storton, and to hear his delirious laugh.

"Ah! ah! you've fed him, Bertram, you've fed him. Well done, old fellow; now I'll feed the other faithful follower, and then we'll finish up our travels in the moon—red heat in the sun—white heat in the moon. Never mind, here goes—"

So saying, Storton released Ned's shoulder as suddenly as he had clutched it, and sprang up to throw himself into the sea, his gaze once more fixed on the monsters who appeared to have as fatal a fascination for his disordered brain as snakes have for the birds on which they feed.

In a moment Ned perceived his intention. It was no time for persuasive words or gentle acts. He turned on him, and with a swift, straight hit out from the shoulder, full at his chest, he felled him, dropping him a dead weight in the bottom of the boat.

At any other time the motionless figure at his feet would have filled Edward Bertram's heart with grief—now he only muttered—

"Better so than to die between the jaws of yonder brute. I did it to save him."

Secure from interruption within the canoe, Ned was once more at liberty to turn his attention to affairs without, and to wonder why, after the first moment, he had felt no further strain upon his wrist. The first glance showed him that his uncouth weapon had done its work with unhoped-for completeness. It still lay buried in the dead body of the giant-fish, and served to tow it along in the boat's wake. It was well for Ned that his cast had been thus fatal, otherwise he would have never lived to make another. In the rapidity and agitation of his preparations, he had so fastened the rope round his wrist that, if his huge victim had been spared time to make any struggles for freedom, Bertram must infallibly have been pulled overboard. Excitement, action, and success had by this time somewhat steadied his brain, and his future proceedings were more wary, although marked by barbarity that requires the excuse of circumstances.

The living fish had swum a short distance off after the slaughter of its companion. But it rapidly regained its boldness, and now once more resumed its horrible, waiting attitude, attending on the slow drifting of the boat.

"Misser Ned," muttered Wagga, whom the recent events had aroused from his long stupor, "Misser Ned, let dead fish go, live fish stop behind with him."

"Very likely," said Ned, through his closed teeth; "but the dead fish means meat for us, and we'll keep it."

As he spoke, Ned took the chisel, or rather plane-iron sharpened at both ends, in his right hand, the other end of the rope in his left, and directing Wagga to throw out some odds and ends to answer the purpose, as before, of bait, he once more planted himself as firmly as he could on his knees, awaited the moment when the shark drew near, flashed the steel in its eyes, and then flung forth the more glittering and tempting prize.

The greedy monster turned over as Ned raised his arm, opened its huge jaws, and swallowed down the keen-edged, treacherous booty. The next instant, before it could recover itself or act in any way, Ned gave one sharp, strong wrench upon the rope, dropped it into the sea the moment after, seized the paddles, and rowed for life from the neighbourhood of the wounded, frantic enemy.





CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A STARTLING CLIMAX TO NED'S CANOEING.

IT was with a sigh of the most intense relief that, when Edward Bertram paused, after fifteen minutes' hard rowing, to look into the sea at the rear of the boat, he discovered that his hope was realized—no living shark was visible. The next thing to be done was to look to Storton, before darkness and forced inactivity came upon them.

Ned's momentary dread that he might have killed his friend was relieved by seeing one of his hands move, and just as he laid down the paddles, a few words of unintelligible jargon still further reassured him.

Under ordinary circumstances, Bertram's first proceeding would have been an attempt to do something for the relief of his companion, but in the present emergency he took advantage of the delirious man's helplessness to bind him securely, hand and foot, before bringing him back to the dangerous semi-consciousness of high fever. One wild or incautious movement might at any moment overturn the frail barque.

Prudence thus consulted, that treasure-trove of bananas proved invaluable aids in further efforts of benevolence. The moist fruit relieved the parching thirst from which they were all suffering, and the skins made cooling plaisters to lay on the sick man's burning forehead. Having done all that was

possible for Storton's comfort, Ned laid himself back in the canoe to rest. The native rolled himself round again, after a final eager glance to make sure that the mass of food they had in tow was still safe, and went to sleep.

Storton fell into a troubled doze, and Ned passed the three or four solemn hours of the night in wakefulness and prayer. Once or twice a black terror surged up in his heart, and almost overwhelmed him, as he realized the whole significance of their position, their utter helplessness and desolateness, drifting on slowly and surely to a lingering, unmarked death in the vast, pitiless tract of waters.

"Oh my Father!" he groaned, as the cold damp of agony stood upon his temples, "have mercy upon us."

A sudden death between the jaws of the sharks began to appear preferable to the awful picture of torturing thirst, starvation, delirium, and prolonged dying misery which his overwrought imagination conjured up. Now and again Storton awoke, startling the night with shrieks, and curdling Ned's blood with the oaths and curses formerly so familiar to the forger's lips, but long since forsaken and repented of. Heavy thunder-clouds crept up the horizon, and the air was oppressive to the last degree. Ned began to think that night would never end, and yet it was, in reality, a very short one, and just as it was about to end he fell asleep.

"Misser Ned, Misser Ned! open her eyes, Misser Ned."

These words, spoken in Wagga's most energetic tones, and accompanied by a pull of his arm, effectually aroused the sleeper, who raised his head, and obeyed the injunction to open his eyes with an eager gaze all round.

"What is it?" he asked after a minute, in an accent of keen disappointment; "I see nothing."

"But there is something all the same, Misser Ned," replied the Indian, pointing his finger towards the south-east, whither they were still drifting.

As he finished speaking, he changed his seat, took up his paddles, and for the first time since the ending of the day on which they left Shipwreck Island, he commenced to row vigorously.

Ned let him do so alone for nearly half-an-hour, while he still kept his own eyes fixed in the direction indicated by Wagga.

At last a cry of joy escaped him, and he too seized the paddles, and imitated his companion's example.

It is necessary to have been for nearly a week in a small, open boat on an unknown sea-desert, during a tropical summer, to understand the depth of thankfulness with which Ned Bertram and Wagga ran their canoe up into a little cove indenting the shores of a small island, after a long spell of steady rowing.

The place was very dimunitive, scarcely more, in fact, than a rock standing out of the sea. But it was a refuge for the time from a brief, fierce storm, that would inevitably have swamped their boat and drowned them. When the storm passed and the sun once more blazed forth, the few trees afforded welcome shelter to the weary wanderers.

Having carried Storton to as comfortable a resting-place as they could find him beneath the trees, the others ensured the safety of their precious boat by conveying it up almost to the centre of the rock, into a cavity of which they pushed it out of reach of the wind should another storm come.

These matters arranged, the next thing was to obtain water by grubbing round the roots of the trees. Cockles and oysters served for food, together with a species of rather bitter-tasted seaweed, which the Indian set the example of eating, and which appeared to have some effect in relieving Storton's fever.

On this desolate rock, of little more than a mile in diameter, the three men remained nearly a fortnight, of which the first

half was spent chiefly in sleep, the latter in looking out with desperate eagerness for passing ships which never came, and in doubts as to future proceedings. But the reprieve from heat, thirst, and constant danger had two effects. Storton recovered his health and strength, and Ned recovered his courage and determination.

"It's very certain," he began suddenly one evening after an hour's silence, during which the three companions sat staring out to sea—"it's very certain that we cannot spend the remainder of our lives on this wretched rock."

"Oh yes! Misser Ned, stay here," interrupted Wagga, who had not yet sufficiently forgotten recent experiences to wish for their repetition.

"All right, old fellow, you may if you like, but I shall not," resumed Edward; "so I vote that we cut it at once, while the sea is smooth and the weather fair."

"Agreed," said Storton. And then they lay down to rest, in order to be ready to start with the dawn.

Wagga went almost frantic when he saw the canoe launched again, with a small cargo of shell-fish and fresh water. He clung to first one, and then the other of his companions, with piteous appeals to them to be content with present safety. When he found all his entreaties vain, he flung himself down on the strand as though in despair, and for neither threats nor advice would he join the others, who at length gave up their attempts at persuasion, jumped into the canoe, and pushed off from the shore.

"But we can't really forsake the obstinate fellow," grumbled Ned, after rowing on for about ten minutes.

He was preparing to put about again, when, lo! Mr. Wagga started up, flung himself into the sea, swam swiftly out to them, scrambled into the canoe, and sat down as coolly as if he had been with them at first starting. He had made use of all the means he knew of to get them to yield

to his wishes, but he had no intention of being really left behind.

This present voyage only lasted two days, when again they reached an island, and once more indulged in a short sojourn on land. Three or four weeks passed in this manner, between as many islands. As they gained the last one, Ned fell ill from the effects of the heat and bad diet, and their strange voyage of discovery was interrupted for nearly a month.

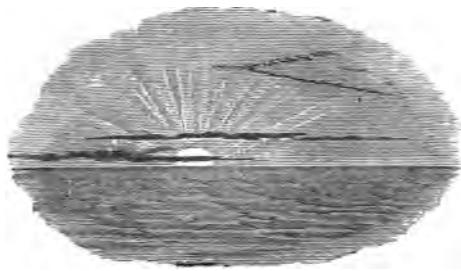
He had scarcely recovered his strength when restlessness once more mastered prudence, and for the fifth time the small canoe and its crew of three passed out of sight of land. In spite of all discomforts, for the first three days all bore up bravely, buoyed with the expectation of certainly soon coming to another of those welcome oases in the water-desert that appeared so numerous in their present neighbourhood. But the third night fell, and they were still out of sight of land.

A fourth day came and went. A fifth. They were without food or water. And once more all the terrible experiences of the first portion of their voyage were repeated. Day and night followed each other, how they scarcely knew. They gave up rowing. They could not sleep. During the daylight they sat with strained eyes gazing out for land, or any sign of hope. But neither flying bird nor floating leaf raised their dying energies. At night their hollow eyes still stared into the darkness with meaningless persistency.

It was Storton's turn now to make a final struggle for their lives.

"Bertram," he said one night, laying his hand on that of his young companion, "we need not help our adverse fortune to kill us. Let us lie down now and sleep. Our watching hitherto has done us no good. Let us sleep through this night, and gain some strength, if possible. To-morrow we will once more take up the paddles, and try for land—and life."

So Storton spoke, and soon all three lay at the bottom of the drifting canoe, wrapped in exhausted slumber. But they were destined never again to touch those paddles. The hours passed—dawn began to faintly tinge the sky on the horizon. A tumult of noise, shouts, and shrieks sounded through Ned's dreams, and the next minute he was struggling frantically in the still dim waters of the ocean.





CHAPTER XXXIX.

BILL ANDERSON ANSWERS AN ADVERTISEMENT.

WN the spring of the year 1842, a gentleman and a weather-beaten sailor sat together in the sanded kitchen of a small inn a few miles out of Plymouth. It was a squally day at the beginning of April, a sort of remnant from the past month, and the two people just mentioned were the only passengers by that day's coach to London.

The postmaster had taken advantage of his unpretending-looking fares to start them on their way to the metropolis in an old coach long since put on one side as past work, and the ramshackle concern had broken down, as might have been anticipated, before twenty miles of the journey were accomplished.

The travellers, outside and in, were coolly told that they would have to stay where they were until the next morning, and there was nothing for it but to bear the delay as patiently as their tempers would allow.

Both men had knocked about the world too much to think a great deal of the distinctions of rank, and they soon got into conversation together in front of the landlady's cheerful fire.

" You are on your way to see your friends, I suppose ?" said the gentleman, eyeing the honest, bronzed countenance of his companion with some interest.

"Not so, sir," was the answer; "and begging your pardon for the contradiction. I've neither kith nor kin as I knows on, and my mates aboard ship are the closest friends I own to. My business in London city is with the lawyer chaps. A matter o' four year ago, a young lad—as bonny a lad as I'd wish to see—passed himself out t' Australy aboard my ship. Leastways, he tried to, but better nor midway the freak took him to jump overboard in a storm, to try and save a ne'er-do-well."

"Ay!" interrupted the listener with sudden eagerness, then adding—"Yes, yes! Go on, if you please. What have lawyers to do with the matter?"

"Why, just this. When t' poor, buffeted *Good Bess* reached port, and we landed for a spell, I came across this 'vertisement, sayin' as how information respectin' Edward Bertram—the very lad I'm meanin', ye see—would be thankfully received, alive or dead, and all expenses paid, by some London lawyer folks. Well, I put the paper by in my kit, an' took ill after that, and thought no more of the matter till I coom across this again a few weeks sin', an' now I think better late nor never, and so here goes."

While speaking, our good-hearted old friend, Bill Anderson, had drawn forth and unfolded a carefully wrapped-up scrap of paper, which he handed to his companion, who perused it with great interest, and the upshot of the conversation that followed was, that both the travellers gave up their journey to the metropolis for the present, and took post-horses northward to Gloucestershire instead.

As the sailor sat beside the gentleman, while they drove along the country roads just donning their first faint tinge of summer greenness, every now and again an exclamation would burst from his lips—

"And he were na' drooned!—And ye knew un—It's passin' strange! passin' strange."

"Ay," responded the gentleman sadly. "But passing sad, too, it seems to me, that the brave lad should have been once so wonderfully spared, only to die in much the same manner after all."

"Perhaps he is na dead; wha kens."

The second day drew to its close, and the travellers began to grow somewhat nervous.

"Ye are sure the lad, Edward Bertram, did belong to the old General up here, sir?" asked Bill Anderson, beginning to think that after all it might have been wiser to obey the advertisement, and carry his information to London.

But his companion had no doubts of that nature. Ned had often spoken to him of the stern old soldier, whose name was well known to all Englishmen. And, even amidst all the glowing beauty of southern scenery, Ned had often described, in terms of affectionate enthusiasm, the beautiful estate that must one day be his, if he lived, but from whose delights his boyhood had been so excluded.

"I have no fears, Anderson, that we are not bringing our news to headquarters," was the answer to Bill's question. "I am much more anxious as to the way in which it may be received. I confess I shall feel inclined to call the old man out if he shows churlishness, or indifference to the fate of his gallant young heir."





C H A P T E R X L.

NEWS AT LAST.

“ **W**ill you please, sir, there are some visitors asking to see
you.”

“ I won’t see them—I won’t see anyone. You know I won’t,” was the passionate answer; and Sir Edward Bertram turned a face that looked almost as grey as his hair, upon the man-servant who still lingered in the doorway.

“ Well !” he exclaimed angrily, “ what now? Are you glued to the ground, sir ? Go at once, and tell them I see no one, for a year past.”

“ I told them that, General, but they said you would see them.”

“ Like their impertinence. Who are they ?”

“ I don’t know, sir ; strangers. One is a gentleman, the other a sailor fellow.”

“ What !” cried the General, starting up, and coming forward. “ A sailor ! What—what—has he come about ?”

“ About Mr. Edward, he——”

Sir Edward waited to hear no more. Striding to the door, he flung the servant on one side, and shouted down the hall in stentorian tones—

“ Sailor, come here, and you, sir.”

The two visitors exchanged looks with each other. The imperious welcome given to them was delivered much in the manner of an African king giving his subjects leave to make themselves into targets for his arrows. However, they had come too far to care to go back now with their mission unfulfilled. They walked forward, and entered the fine library of Bertram Hall, which was its owner's usual sitting-room.

Inside the room they stood still, and awaited some further salutation, but none came, and just as the gentleman was about to mention the object of their visit, the stern, fierce-looking old General fell at their feet in a swoon.

Happily at this juncture Mr. Jarvis came hurrying up, to learn the meaning of the scrap of information brought to him by the footman. Flinging himself down beside his employer, he lost no time in using every effort for his recovery, volubly abusing the strangers, meanwhile, to their infinite surprise, for being guilty of gross cruelty and heartlessness.

"Why," cried Bill Anderson at last, smarting under a sense of unjust treatment, "ye've no call to gae jawin' us at this gate. I'm main sorry the old gentleman be took ill, but 'tisna to our blame. He cared no more for's nephew than for a dog, nor sae mooch, by all seeming."

"Then all seeming is false," came a murmur from between the General's pale quivering lips. "Tell me he lives, that God has had this pity on my desolate old age, and I will bless you on my knees."

But Bill Anderson had not this assurance to give, so he choked instead, and rubbed his sleeve over his eyes, with a sudden revulsion of feeling towards the bereaved veteran. He helped Jarvis to raise him from the ground, and assisted him to his arm-chair with as much gentleness as though it were Ned himself upon whom he was attending, and in the two hours' talk that followed he softened as much as possible everything that could wound his hearer's feelings.

Anderson's narrative ended, he called upon his companion to continue it, which he did, until the night of the day on which Ned and his companions rowed away from Shipwreck Island, to seek for land more in the track of passing vessels than that had lately proved to be.

"You should have *made* that American captain stop and look for him, sir," growled the General, when Mr. Bell concluded his recital with a sigh for past memories. "You should have forced him to put about, and institute a search for your friends."

"We used every effort to do so, but in vain."

"Did you put a pistol to the scoundrel's breast, sir, and threaten to shoot him if he sailed on?" shouted Sir Edward, furiously; "no, of course you did not."

"No, certainly, we did not do that," assented the doctor, with a slight smile. But he had already discovered that the white-haired, hard-spoken veteran had a heart softer than his tongue, and during the remainder of the day, while he and Anderson accepted the boundless hospitality of the owner of Bertram Hall, he already learnt to feel a friendship for the man whose reserve and outer harshness had driven his nephew into exile, to dangers and hardships innumerable, and possibly to death.

That last final and irretrievable possibility, however, General Bertram refused to listen to, and with the energy and restlessness which his nephew had inherited, before he went to sleep that night he had already declared his intention of setting out for the Indian Ocean and Australia, to trace and find his missing heir. Bill Anderson and the faithful Jarvis should go with him, and Mr. Bell, if he would.

But that could not be, for Mr. Bell had just come to the West of England to buy a physician's practice, and he was now going back to fetch his daughters, Rosa and Josephine, who would already be growing anxious at his absence.

"Very well," conceded Sir Edward at last, reluctantly. "But at any rate, then, you must promise to come and pay us a long visit when we get to England."

"Oh, certainly, I promise that," said Mr. Bell, with an outward appearance of ready and cheerful hope that he was far from feeling inwardly.

Anderson had more faith in the future.





CHAPTER XLI.

JEFFERY ROBINSON ADRIFT.

"YOU have had a very long illness from overwork, Mr. Robinson, and I repeat I strongly advise you not to go up for the forthcoming examination. You are not now in a state of preparation to do yourself justice."

Mr. Chase was in his rooms at Newdigate, and Jeffery Robinson had come to report himself on his return after a six months' absence with brain fever, and to declare his intention of at once resuming his studies, and going in for his final examination without further delay than was necessary.

A longer acquaintance had not made Mr. Chase like his clever pupil any better than he did the first day of their introduction to each other, but he had felt an extorted admiration for his abilities, as Fred Nicholson and Dr. Brown had done in the old days at Errington, and he had a sincere wish to save him the bitter disappointment he was likely to bring upon himself if he persisted in his determination.

But illness had had no softening effect upon Robinson's temper and self-will. He took the well-meant counsel as an insult; and, when he had to listen to its second and third emphatic repetition, he drew those lowering brows of his together into a heavy scowl, and muttered in a tone of studied impertinence—

"Thanks for your gratuitous lecture ; I prefer those in the college course. I choose to follow my own opinion as to what is best."

"Then," exclaimed the tutor, rising as he spoke, and irritated into momentary loss of self-restraint—"then you choose, sir, to be a fool, as you have been before, and will be again."

"A what?" hissed Jeffery Robinson, livid with rage, and advancing a step nearer.

"A fool, sir—a—"

And then the tutor's words were stopped with a blow, and the following day his passionate pupil's University career was brought to an end by summary dismissal from his college.

His ambition was destroyed, his spirit broken, and before another year had passed over him he had hidden his lowered head in the Australian bush.

"Keep you, indeed !" exclaimed a squatter, contemptuously, and looking at the round-shouldered, white-handed scholar of Newdigate to whom he had given a night's hospitality, and who now muttered a request to be kept on as a servant, or help of some sort, at the Bush Inn, where travellers could obtain almost anything, when seasons were good, excepting cleanliness and civility.

"Keep you, indeed !" repeated the ex-convict and present innkeeper. "What on earth do you suppose would be the good of a fine gentleman like you about the place? What do you know about selling candles or cart-grease, or mending up an old horse-shoe, or making a pile of dampers, or getting a good price out of customers for a potful of 'fat-hen' when there's nothing better to be got?"

The University man's silence confessed his ignorance on all these points. Indeed he had never so much as heard of the spinach-like weed to which the settlers give the deceptive title of fat-hen—as for cooking it, or selling it, that would be as difficult to him as the mending of the old horse-shoe. Worn

with wretchedness and privation, he shouldered his bundle, and prepared to continue his weary search for employment.

As he turned to the door some one else entered, to whom the innkeeper shouted, "Hullo, neighbour, you've come in the nick of time. Yon fine gentleman wants a situation. You don't happen to want a lecturer down at your clearing, do you? I don't feel to, myself."

"Nor I, thank you," laughed the new-comer; "but, I say," he added after a moment, in a changed tone, "there's them young uns of mine, you know, Smith. The missus is always on at me about their not being able to read your signboard, nor write their own names. This might be a rare chance to please her. What do you say, young gentleman? would it suit your wishes to turn tutor to my three boys?"

Robinson's condition was so desperate that he was prepared to say "yes" to almost any offer, and the present one really seemed, on the surface, to be quite a splendid opening.

An hour later he was accompanying his new employer still farther into the bush, and the next day he entered on his trying occupation of tutor to three half-clothed, dirty, neglected, impudent little savages.

The task of trying to put crumbs of knowledge into those unwilling shock heads would have been a really terrible one for even the most patient and hum-drum of teachers, but to the irritable, fierce-tempered Robinson it was absolutely awful. The spiteful children spared him no item in his day's miseries, and even at night their ingenious torments frequently helped to increase the discomforts of the rough, insect-filled bark-hut, and bed of straw and ragged blankets, which were considered quite good enough for the refined and fastidious tutor.

Once or twice just anger got the better of the prudence he had learnt so bitterly, and he administered a box on the ears to one or other of his pupils. On each occasion the urchin rushed off roaring and screaming to his parents, who lost no

time in soothing his injured feelings by furiously scolding the tutor.

"Look here, my fine fellow," said the settler one day before his children, "the next time you lay a hand on one of my youngsters you'll rue it."

Robinson determined to save every penny of his salary for the next two or three months, and thus obtain means to escape to some happier position, but the climax came before his purpose was accomplished.

The mother taunted Robinson with the small progress his pupils made, and they persisted more obstinately than ever in resisting his efforts to push them on. They ridiculed his looks and his ways, tore his clothes, and stole his hard-earned money. His very forbearance was a subject for their contempt. At last his patience was exhausted, and, careless of consequences, he bestowed a couple of sound cuffs upon the eldest boy and dismissed him from the schoolroom.

An hour passed before he heard anything more of the affair—then the father made his appearance.

"You and one of your pupils have had another affray, I hear, sir," said the settler quietly.

"Yes," said Robinson, breathing more freely. He had been nerving himself to encounter a storm of fierce reproaches and threats, and the man's calm tone and manner were a great relief to him. Had he known Jem Howland better, he would rather have preferred to have dealings with a mad dog than with him when he spoke in that cool, slow voice.

He was a man who rarely took the trouble to be in a passion, but those who knew Jem were very careful not to quarrel with him. To use his own phrase, he always paid off all his scores with interest. He considered compassion a virtue only fit for girls, and he had no more mercy in him than a tiger. But the unfortunate tutor knew nothing of this as he answered thankfully—

"Yes. I am sorry, but I assure you his impertinence was beyond bearing."

"Ah, just so, no doubt," said the settler. "And, do you know, I have made up my mind that it is a pity you should have to put up with any more of it; so, if you'll just get ready, I'll bring the gig round, and drive you myself to a more peaceful locality."

"Now—at once!" asked Robinson, in astonishment.

"Ay, to be sure. Why not? We made our agreement in a minute, and we can break it in a minute, can't we? Not that I mind giving you a month's pay over and above your due either," he added, with a significant chuckle that much puzzled his hearer.

Little more than thirty minutes later, Robinson had said good-bye to his pupils and their home, and was driving along a scarcely perceptible road through the uncleared brush, in company with the farmer and his stockman, a big, powerful man, whose occupation of driving wild herds of cattle had not tended to soften his rugged nature.

Scarcely a word passed for some time between the three companions, as they drove on and on along a route marked out by nothing but an apparently interminable succession of the dreary, scanty-leaved eucalyptus trees.

"I cannot imagine," said Robinson at last, "how any number of years can teach you to know your way through such country as this. There does not seem to me to be the slightest sign to show whence you have come, nor where you should go. I should think no place in the world can match these Australian tracts for desolateness and monotony. Shall we soon reach something more cheerful?"

The farmer and his stockman exchanged looks as the former answered quickly, "All in good time, all in good time."

They went on for another hour, and then all descended to dine off the mutton and damper they had brought with them.

The stockman made a fire and boiled coffee, and then pipes followed, after which he and the settler threw themselves at full length on the ground, declaring they must have a doze before they went any further. Robinson fell into the barbarous trap laid for him, and followed their example.

He awoke an hour later, and found himself alone.

Now he understood the smooth speeches and the meaning glances which had so puzzled him.

Short as his sojourn had been in Australia, it had been quite long enough for him to hear many a dismal tale of travellers dying of starvation and thirst in the bush. This was the fate to which the vengeful Jem Howland had consigned him.

Hour after hour he sat there, till the darkness gathered up around him, and he could hear the soft footfalls of the opossums as they ran up and down the trunks. He bitterly envied the unthinking kangaroo-rats, who sat blinking their bright eyes at him from the burnt hollows of the neighbouring trees. They all had homes, he had none.

Friendless, homeless, alone, and burdened with a heavy conscience, it was little wonder that Robinson envied even the very insects with which the Australian bush is so uncomfortably crowded.

One event after another of his past life came back to him during that solemn night, and he wondered many times whether the young school-fellow of old, Ned Bertram, whom he had treated so cruelly, would feel satisfied now, if he could see him, that his own sufferings of former days had been sufficiently avenged.

With the daylight he rose, and set off walking rapidly to try to escape. If he continued on in the same direction, it seemed that he must at length come at least to a river or stream of some sort that would furnish him with food, and be a guide to him.

Cheered with this thought, he bore up bravely throughout

the day, and had just decided that another similarly sustained effort would certainly carry him out of the bush the next day, when a cry escaped him, and he sank down, burying his face in his hands.

He had come back to the spot from which he had started in the morning. There were the ashes of the fire at which the stockman had cooked the coffee, the broken pipe Jem Howland had thrown away, and the bit of wrapping canvas in which the mutton had been folded.

In spite of his despair Robinson fell asleep, and dreamt all night of Edward Bertram and the grammar school of Errington.





CHAPTER XLII.

TRACKING AN HEIR.

"**V**TOLD you so ; I always told you so," said a testy old gentleman, who stood in the coffee-room of the Royal Hotel, Sydney. "If I had taken my own way I should have had my heir at home with me a couple of years ago. Of course he came to Australia. All sensible young fellows of spirit come to Australia. Jarvis, mind this, we start for the farm he's on the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Yes, General ; certainly, Sir Edward," replied the obedient Jarvis, and looking almost as happy as his companions, the General and Bill Anderson.

Thanks to Mr. Bell's information as to the canoe, news as to its owners was easily obtained at Sydney, and the poor old uncle was at length in a fair way to recover the nephew whom he had helped to drive into all manner of perils by an affection of indifference to his happiness.





CHAPTER XLIII.

A FINAL ESCAPE, AND—HOME.

ALTHOUGH in the last chapter an intimation has been given of the safety of our hero, it must be remembered that we left Edward Bertram struggling at early dawn in the waters of the Indian Ocean. We find him, a year or two later, a stockman on an Australian farm in the bush. The same ship that ran down the small canoe gave shelter a few minutes later to its three occupants, and about a fortnight after Ned found himself in the beautiful harbour of Sydney, for which he had so long ago left England.

Our three friends were scarcely landed before they were besieged with offers of employment, either together or separately.

“Decidedly together,” said Bertram and Storton. And Wagga being equally anxious on that point, a lucky farmer, owning a clearing some seventy miles south of Sydney, secured the services of three of the steadiest, most industrious, and reliable workers to be found in the colony.

Storton found ample scope for his carpentering abilities in making houses, sheds, and cattle yards. Wagga proved a much more valuable acquisition than his master had expected, for his apprenticeship under the Bells, on Shipwreck Island,

had taught him some of the perseverance in which Indians, as a rule, are sadly deficient. As for Ned himself, he was at last in his element. On the half-cleared cattle farm on the edge of the Australian scrub there was full scope for even his super-abundant pluck and energy.

That you may have a true notion of what Ned's duties and employments were, and what yours will be if you choose to accept a similar position, I will give you a real Australian stockman's account of his experience.

Of course, in the first place, he must be a man of intelligence. He must be quick at finding the cattle when they stray. He must accustom each mob to run to its camp at the crack of the stock-whip. He must be able to gather out his own stragglers from the midst of many thousands of others at the periodical cattle musters of a district. He must be able to mend his saddle, and shoe his horse. And, above all, he must not be afraid to gallop over any sort of country, to be charged by a wild bullock, or to encounter a tribe of blacks.

Of course Ned was not able to do all these things directly he landed in Australia; neither did he become a stockman immediately; but he received his first lessons pretty soon, and they were tolerably rough ones.

By the time he was a fine, strong, sunburnt fellow of twenty, he was equal to anything that was required of him, and up to almost any emergency. He and his favourite horse, Black Prince, were known far and wide.

There is not time now to tell of his splendid rescue of the cedar-cutters when the floods were out, nor of the terrible meeting of himself and Storton with the half-mad sailor of the *Good Bess*, when the victim of superstition and delusion set the rank grass of the bush on fire, to rid the world, as he said, of a demon in the person of poor penitent Storton.

Storton escaped, but the unhappy madman himself perished in the wild and far-spread flames, in spite of Bertram's almost

frantic efforts to save him from the fearfully magnificent funeral pyre which he had lighted for his own destruction.

But we must hasten to a conclusion.

"Where are you off to?" exclaimed Storton, one morning, as Ned rode slowly past the hut, looking very thoughtful.

"I don't know," said Ned, a smile brightening his face for a moment. "But the fact is, some of the cattle are lost, stolen, or strayed—we don't know which. The head stockman has got an attack of rheumatic fever, 'the pains,' as he calls it, poor wretch, and I'm off in his stead to find the beasts if I can, and head them home again."

"Oh, I see. So that accounts for your unusually solemn face, then."

"No, it doesn't," answered Ned quickly, and bending over the neck of his horse that his lowered tones might be audible to his friend—"the fact is, Storton, that I don't thoroughly trust that convict Brown who has lately come to work here, and I am sorry to say he is to go with me, and Cobawn Bill is to be our tracker. I believe, for my part, that they are in league with each other, and that both the Indian and Brown know perfectly well the whereabouts of the missing cattle. But see, they are ready. I must be off."

And before Storton could utter a word of advice, agreement, or dissuasion from the doubtful expedition, Ned had cracked his whip and started off in a gallop.

Storton returned to his own work, looking rather anxious. But it does not answer, when one is in the bush, to take alarm at every cloud in the sky, for if folks did, the colonies would be in a perpetual state of panic.

"And forewarned is forearmed," murmured Storton, during the course of the morning, still thinking about his friend. "And he had his pistols with him."

Just as that comforting remembrance came to Storton, Bertram, unperceived by his companions, was drawing forth one

of those weapons for immediate use. Brown and the Indian, Cobawn Bill, had exchanged a good many looks and half uttered words during the last mile or so, and Brown had taken to lagging behind.

Bertram turned to order him forward just in time to catch him with his hands up to his mouth. This action, which he had truly construed as the prelude to a signal, confirmed all his suspicions.

It was the work of a moment for Ned to seize his pistol, but the long, ringing "Coe-ee" escaped even sooner from Brown's mouth.

The place had been well chosen for an attack. The path was so narrow as scarcely to leave room to turn a horse, while the dense jungle on either hand was rendered still more forbidding by the warning scarlet blossoms of the deadly nettle, or stinging-tree, as it is commonly called. Fifty yards or so in front the path widened, and the jungle gave way to open forest land. If Ned could reach this, he was mounted so well that he would have a fair chance of escape from any number of enemies, otherwise he saw at once that his life was not worth ten minutes' purchase.

Grasping the reins tightly in one hand, and holding the pistol ready for use in the other, he shouted, for Brown's benefit, "You pitiful scoundrel, you!" and made a dash forward.

It was too late. A man rushed towards him with a cry. Behind him came three others, also carrying firearms. Ned reined up Prince, and fired. At the same time one of the bushrangers fired, and poor, faithful Black Prince reared, sprang up into the air, and fell back dead, Ned having barely time to free his feet from the stirrups, and spring to the ground, to avoid being crushed beneath his poor favourite.

He was desperate now. Turning upon the traitor who had caused his cruel loss, he struck him to the ground with the butt end of one pistol, while he blindly fired the other in the

direction of the bushrangers. And then, with two unloaded pistols in his hands, he stood awaiting death, from which, as far as his powers were concerned, there was absolutely no way of escape.

The enemy appeared disposed to take matters quietly now. They stopped to examine the man who had been foremost, and had fallen with Ned's first shot. That minute's delay was fatal to them, but it saved Ned's life. As he stood there waiting for them to come on, he was astonished to see them suddenly rise, pause as though listening to some sound, and then turn to fly. However, this time it was their turn to be too late to escape. Eight or nine horsemen barred their way, five of the number being members of the mounted police force.

Ten minutes later the three bushrangers, with their confederates, Brown and the Indian, were secured, bound, and placed on horseback in front of their captors.

"I am glad we were in time to save your life, my good fellow," said the officer in charge of the party, to Ned, regarding him meantime with evident admiration. "And now, if you feel grateful to us for the act," he added, laughing, "perhaps you will conduct us to your station, if it is near at hand, for we have had a twelve hours' march from Sydney without food, and we and our animals are knocked up."

"And so are we knocked up," exclaimed an old gentleman, who was one of the party. "We left Sydney yesterday morning, and if I haven't had to sleep out in the open air on the bare ground, as if it was war time. That rascally young nephew of mine ought to be horsewhipped for bringing his old uncle tramping over the world to look for him."

During this speech Ned had darted forward and gazed at the speaker, as though he were a vision, while the colour came and went on his bronzed cheeks like a girl's. However, before he could say anything, or his strange appearance had been noticed, the wounded man had been discovered on the pathway, and

the general attention was attracted to the supposed fourth bushranger.

With some difficulty he also was lifted upon a horse, and during the operation a letter fell out of his pocket, which Bertram picked up, and as he did so, his eyes fell upon the address, and he received another shock. Grasping the letter, Ned directed that Cobawn Bill should be made once more to act as guide, and early in the afternoon the large cavalcade drew rein at the farm.

While Storton, Wagga, and the squatter himself hospitably supplied the wants of the remainder of the company of unexpected visitors, Bertram carried the wounded prisoner to his own bed, and soon restored him to consciousness.

“Food, food,” murmured the poor creature, feebly, when he could speak.

Ned opened a little box made for him long since by Storton, when they were on Shipwreck Island, to serve as a provision box, and which he generally wore slung round his waist. The only thing it contained just now was a bit of cane, about six inches in length. This he took out, and held towards the man, saying sternly, “Do you ask *me* for food, Robinson? Do you remember that bit of cane, which you broke on my back when I was little more than a desolate child? And now you would have murdered me if you could—basely, and in cold blood—one of a gang of cowardly, worthless wretches. Take that bit of wood and gnaw it, and see if it will satisfy your craving in the same way that it satisfied my boyhood’s craving for a little kindness and forbearance. What other favour do you dare ask at *my* hands?”

“None,” murmured Robinson, in a scarcely audible whisper, as he recognised Bertram—“none. But forgive me.”

Then his eyes closed again. Ned little knew that he was really dying of starvation. At that moment the police officer hastened up to the bed.

"Sir," he exclaimed, "pardon me, but I find this man has no connection with my prisoners. Indeed, I believe he may have been a sufferer at their hands, if, as I imagine, this pocket-book be his. Meantime," he continued, with his fingers on Robinson's pulse, "he will not live to reclaim it, I fear, for he is sinking rapidly from exhaustion. Been lost, no doubt, in the bush."

The last words were lost upon Ned. It had never entered his head to think that his former schoolfellow might be absolutely starving, until the officer mentioned the fact. It need not be said that he then lost not another moment in flinging away once for all the doubly hateful piece of cane, and ministering to the sufferer with an anxious, eager solicitude that almost broke the poor penitent's heart. While he was once more asking, with trembling lips, to be again assured of the forgiveness which Ned had already granted, a quick, sharp voice exclaimed from the further end of the hut, "Young man, do you happen to know how far it is from here to a place called 'Woolman's Farm'?"

"This is Woolman's Farm," replied Ned, going forward.

"This is!" exclaimed the old gentleman, starting to his feet.

"Then—then—where is my heir? Where—where is my poor lost boy?"

"I am here, uncle," said Ned, quietly and rather coldly.

There is little necessity to tell the reader that all the coldness died out of Ned's warm heart when he learnt from Jarvis and good Bill Anderson, and, later on, from Mr. Bell also, and Dr. Brown of Errington, the enduring sorrow that had almost crushed the old General at his loss, and the eager hopefulness he had nourished of once more seeing him again.

Whether the General was most vexed, in return, to find his heir a tall, broad-shouldered, sensible-looking young man instead of the mischievous boy with whom he had meant to be so forbearing, it would be hard to say. But it is quite

certain that he soon learnt to have as much pride as affection for him, and on returning to England made more vigorous efforts than ever to improve the estate for his future benefit.

Two or three months after the unexpected meeting, Edward Bertram said a somewhat doleful, but very affectionate farewell to his already thriving friends, the partners Storton and Jeffery Robinson, and set sail to return to England, rich in the possession of an affectionate uncle, who was bent on spoiling and indulging him to any extent he might desire.

Some readers may be glad to learn that a few years later Mr. Bell's lovely younger daughter, Josephine, left her father's home to take up her abode at Bertram Hall, with the new name of Mrs. Edward Bertram, and was ever a life-long proof to her husband that even the heaviest troubles, rightly borne, "work together for good."



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